

THE DANGERS TO REST

The Brides' Warning
Revelation 2-3



by
Thomas M. Mitchell

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The Danger to Rest: The Brides' Warning - Revelation 2-3

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ISBN Ebook: 978-1-929378-05-0

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INTRODUCTION

Many casual worshipers in Christian churches today who are quite familiar with the Sermon on the Mount are not aware of the existence of the seven messages of Christ [in Revelation]. Many of the evils and shortcomings which exist in the church today are a direct outgrowth of neglect of the solemn instruction given to these seven churches.

John F. Walvoord

We have been inundated, not with the shout of triumph but the incessant worldly scream of pending disaster. The country's economics have been turned upside down and fear and panic have grabbed the headlines as the Middle East falls into chaos. The news is full of rampant pandemics, meteorological disasters, hopeless individuals committing tragic acts, families destroyed... I leave it to you to fill in the blanks.

I have talked with many in the ministry and with believers from all walks of life and the message ranges from uncertainty to fear and sometimes to anticipation. Even those whose economic future is not clouded are focused on some issue of personal concern. The challenges facing the 21st century church may not be lions, boiling oil, fire or crucifixion but the clouds on the horizon are unnervingly similar and they are driving many to the last book in the Bible.

For a number of years the Lord has continued to impress upon my heart the strong message that we, the bride of Christ, are not prepared for His return. We have allowed the world and its supreme ruler to distract us from the path the lies in front of us.

Now the Lord has released me to write this book that He put on my heart 18 years ago concerning His messages to His bride. His love letters that not only deal with why He is coming back but also what we are supposed to be doing (and not doing) as we wait. It's for this hour that the messages in these letters have been reserved.

Talk with any believer today and I doubt that you would find one that is not convinced that Jesus' return is near. Let me suggest one verse that has strong implication for us here in the 21st century:

Matt 24:6-7 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. 6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

While this is certainly defining the world we live in, the key phrase is “all these things.” As we look around today it’s evident that “all” of them are taking place at the same time and it’s certain that we are closer today than we were yesterday. But that is “not” what this book is about; far from it. We only need remember that the Lord Jesus Himself stated that even He didn’t know the day or the hour (*Mk 13:32*). But come back He will and there are two very clear reasons for His return that should encourage us; one which precedes the other and clearly impacts every believer.

First consider that Jesus is coming back for you (His bride) and God has clearly shown us how and why. Consider the Jewish wedding whose entire ritual from beginning to end speaks to our ultimate wedding with Jesus. His return follows the ceremonial process in every detail and I would urge you to look for references to it as portrayed throughout the Old Testament. For our purpose here let’s just consider one part of the process that not only speaks volumes about His return but is a wonderful source of encouragement in these troubled times.

When the Jewish bridegroom pledged himself to his bride and paid the bride’s price she became betrothed and the couple was effectively married, although the marriage was not yet consummated. The betrothal (*ketubah*) was celebrated with a glass of wine signifying the marriage covenant. The bride was then set apart (to be sanctified) and the bridegroom told her that he was to return to his father to build a house for her and when it’s was finished he return for her. She was to return to her father’s house and “wait” and “watch” for his imminent return. He then began building her house but he wasn’t the one who determined when it was complete; that was his father’s decision and he didn’t know the time or the hour.

*Mark 13:32-33 But of that day and that hour **knoweth no man**, no, not the angels which are in heaven, **neither the Son**, but the Father.
33 Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.*

And then one day when he least expected it, usually in the dead of night, his father proclaimed that the house was finished and told his son that it was time for him to go and bring his bride home. At that unknown moment he rushed to his bride with a gathering of followers and called her to come forth and go with him to her new home where the marriage was consummated and the 7 day “wedding” (*huppah*) and “supper” was celebrated where he would once again drink wine with her. I’m sure I don’t need to make the connection for you. Jesus established the marriage covenant for His bride (the church):

*1 Cor 11:25-26 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "**This cup is the new covenant in My blood**. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.*

And He paid the price:

*1 Cor 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For **you were bought at a price**; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

His bride was set apart (sanctified):

*Eph 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 **that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word**, 27 that He might present her to Himself **a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing**, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*

*1 Cor 6:11 And such were some of you. But **you were washed**, but **you were sanctified**, but **you were justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*

*Heb 10:10 By that will **we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all**.*

Jesus departed to prepare a place for His bride:

*John 14:1-4 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. **I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself**; that where I am, there ye may be also. 4 And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.*

And His return is “imminent;” the time period is indefinite but nothing needs to precede it (it can happen anytime). Jesus coming for His bride is the next event on God’s calendar and it can truly happen at any moment:

*Phil 3:20-21 For **our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior**, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.*

*Titus 2:13 looking for **the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ**,*

*Heb 9:28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him **He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation**.*

*Rev 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "**Surely I am coming quickly**." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

Jesus' return as the bridegroom will be a surprise "gathering" that is announced with a shout as portrayed in the parable of the virgins (Matt 25).

*1Thess 4:16-18 For **the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout**, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

And what was the bride doing during the whole time the bridegroom was building her home? She had already been given his hand, his promise and his commitment, the only thing remaining was his return.

*Matt 25:6-13 And at midnight there was a cry made, **Behold, the bridegroom cometh**; go ye out to meet him. 7 Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' 10 **And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.** 11 "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' 12 But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 "**Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.***

And there will be a wedding in heaven and a marriage supper on earth:

*Pss 45:10-15 Listen, O daughter, Consider and incline your ear; **Forget your own people also, and your father's house**; 11 So the King will greatly desire your beauty; Because He is your Lord, worship Him. 12 And the daughter of Tyre will come with a gift; The rich among the people will seek your favor. 13 The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace; Her clothing is woven with gold. 14*

She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colors; The virgins, her companions who follow her, shall be brought to You.

*Rev 19:9 Then he said to me, "Write: **'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'**" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."*

Have you been given Jesus' hand, His promise and His commitment? Did you say yes when He asked you to be His bride? Hopefully you did as the letters we are about to explore are for His bride and they hold not only some incredible promises, they also include some strong challenges for her as she *watches and waits* for her bridegrooms call. The story of the 10 virgins is what this book is all about and the reason Jesus called John to heaven to personally deliver seven letters containing His personal messages to His bride.

But there is, however, another reason that Jesus is coming back; one that follows His taking home His bride. He is coming back for His creation.

*Rom 8:19-23 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because **the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.** 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.*

Let's consider for a moment the story of Ruth and how it points well into the future concerning the role of the kinsman. You can read the story for yourself and the role of the kinsman redeemer (*avenger*) who, according to Oriental law, was required to be the next of kin as detailed in *Leviticus 25*. Here I only want to draw some key elements from the redemption process that have meaning for us today.

If a Jew had a debt he couldn't pay his possessions could be taken from him to secure the debt, at which time he became a slave to the creditor and would remain as such until he repaid the debt, six years passed or the year of Jubilee occurred. Now there were only three things

that could be held as security for his debt: a wife, a slave, and a possession (land; *Lev 25:23-25*). When his property was taken there were two scrolls produced containing the terms of redemption. The first contained the details of the property that was taken, which was held in the public records for all to see. The second was sealed with 7 seals and held in the temple only to be brought out when the property was redeemed. Later the process was reduced to one scroll written on both sides.

Now the property could only be redeemed by the debtor himself or his kinsman redeemer who had to be qualified on three pivotal points.

1. He was a family member;
2. He was willing; and
3. He had the means with which to pay the redemption price.

The kinsman redeemer would present himself to the high priest or judge with proof of his relationship to the debtor and his willingness and ability to pay the price. The scroll was brought forth and the 7 seals were removed publicly revealing the terms of redemption. The price was paid thereby canceling the mortgage and the debtor was returned his possessions. This process is clearly detailed for us in the story of Ruth where Boaz, as her kinsman redeemer, not only redeemed the land but he redeemed Ruth as his wife. Now fast forward to the 5th chapter of the book of Revelation and use this lens to look at what John saw; emphasis mine.

*Rev 5:1-7 And I saw in the right hand of **Him (God) who sat on the throne** a scroll written inside and on the back, **sealed with seven seals**. 2. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, **"Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?"** 3. And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. 4. So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. 5 But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, **the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David**, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." 6 And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders,*

*stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 **Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him (God) who sat on the throne (The Kinsman Redeemer; Jesus).***

Here then is our scroll, the “Scroll of Redemption” with its 7 seals that has been held by God for either the owner or his kinsman redeemer to pay the price. Who is our debtor and what possessions does the creditor hold? Well our debtor is no other than Adam himself. He was given free and clear ownership of the earth and all creation and he lost it along with his soul and his wife to Satan. Jesus is going to redeem His creation, the very creation that Adam mortgaged by his act in The Garden, and the seven seals will be opened by the only one qualified to be its kinsman redeemer:

*Rev 5:9-10 And they sang a new song, saying: "**You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood** Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, 10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."*

Remember that 3 things could be redeemed: a servant, a wife, and land. We were incapable of redeeming ourselves or the earth but Jesus was. He is our kinsman:

John 1:14 The root and the offspring of David (Rev 22:16); The Word made Flesh and dwelt among us.

He was willing and He went to the cross freely:

Heb 12:2 For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross.

Jesus was able and paid the price for us with His blood—redeemed with the precious blood of the lamb (*1 Pet 1:18-19*). He first redeemed His slave (man) on the Cross, then He will redeem His bride (believers), and finally His property (the earth) by opening the remaining seven seals

during the Great Tribulation and meeting out the associated judgments. Now, before moving ahead, let's take a moment and consider the subject of the rapture of the church.

We became betrothed to Jesus as His bride and at that moment He gave us His commitment to return for us (*John 14:1-4*). He paid our "bride's price" with His blood upon the cross and now it is the moment of His return that we all anxiously await. Which brings up a subject that has troubled many believers: *when does the bride get taken to her new home?*

The subject of the "rapture of the church" is one that has supporters on multiple sides including:

- It will happen.
- It won't happen.
- It will take place before the tribulation.
- It will take place midway through the tribulation.
- It will take place after the tribulation.

It's not my intention here to cover the rapture in detail as there are many scholars that have written about it in depth. But for our purposes it's important that I define my position on the subject in order that you will have a clear understanding of why I view the Book of Revelation as I do. My personal position is that the rapture of the church occurs prior to the great tribulation, prior to the removal of the seven seals and all the accompanying tribulation.

Here are two things to consider: 1) In the first 3 chapters of *Revelation* the church is mentioned 19 times but after *Rev 3:22* she is not mentioned again as being on the earth; and 2) from Chapter 4 until Chapter 19 God is not once addressed as "Father;" He is referred to in Old Testament terms such as God, Lord, Almighty, etc. The only exception is *Rev 14:1* where He is called the Father of Christ. So, now I invite you to be like the Bereans and search the Word of God and let the Holy Spirit reveal to you the truth.

With that said, how we view the rapture can be set aside for the rest of this book. We may have differing views on when He is coming back for His bride but we all agree that He is coming back. So what we're

going to look at concerns what we—His bride—are to be doing as we await His “promised and certain” return. And those instructions are clearly given to us in the messages to the seven churches. As we explore these messages we’re going to see that they are not just the stern warning of Jesus to the church but they are also a “wake-up call” that He chose to personally deliver because He loves His bride so deeply.

This book is intended to open up these letters in a fresh way in order to bring about a revelation in our understanding and a change in our attitude. They deserve no less reflection and study than all the other letters found in the New Testament; *Romans*, *Ephesians*, *Corinthians*, etc. They need to be taken out of the pure realm of revelation and prophecy (*apokalupsis* and *propheteia*) and read with an eye to practical, daily application in our life. To do this requires adapting the understanding of the first century church. What was the critically important message from Jesus that John was delivering to each one; a message that merited Christ's intervention?

In order to fully partake of this meal set before us it must be eaten with the appropriate utensils and the right attitude. To that end my understanding and interpretation will steer away from conclusions that lead us down a path that has been determined ahead of time. I have no other objective here other than to open up these letters to encourage, exhort and challenge us. In order to keep that premise we will only look at these letters in the simple, straightforward truth that I believe supports the intent of the author.

Our job is to attempt to understand what is taught in the text and then relate that message to our own generation and time. In this way our walk will be with the Word of God and not the word of man. In other words, take these three chapters of *Revelation* as they are, listen closely to what John is saying about what he saw and then apply it to your own life. So what is this book?

- The revelation God gave to Christ.
- The revelation of Jesus Christ.
- The revelation Christ sent by His angel.
- The revelation the angel gave to John.
- The revelation John was to deliver to the church.

What are these letters?

- They are, unlike the other letters in the New Testament, not only inspired by God but from the very lips of Jesus Himself.
- They are written in terms that speak directly to actual individual churches; uncovering that message makes them applicable to the bride of Christ today.
- Many say they represent the church down through the ages and that the church today is at the last stage; Laodicea. We will find out that these letters are also alive and speak (sevenfold strongly) to the individual members of the body of Christ at large; and they do so in the same fullness they did in the first century.

The New Testament Church is set in a real world (24x7) in which the Gospel is alive with the message of salvation. The Kingdom of God is placed right in the middle of all the turbulence and chaos that surrounds us and we need to exercise our obedience and patience to see it fulfilled. If Jesus thought it was important enough to appear to John in person and deliver these messages then the bride ought to “hear” and not just listen to what He has to say. We need to explore these letters through the language and lens of the time, keeping the following in mind:

- What character of Christ is revealed to the church?
- What was the church accomplishing?
- What was their shortcoming?
- What was the admonishment?
- What was the encouragement?
- What does it mean to our walk today?

Because... *The Bride of Christ Sleeps at Her Own Peril.*

There are three key elements in understanding what it means to be the bride of Christ; three elements that are a part of ensuring that we are not found sleeping when the Lord returns for His Bride. The first is found in the Song of Solomon where we discover what it means to be the bride; through the eyes of Christ. It's in the words of Solomon that the love of Christ for His bride is revealed.

We must first and foremost understand what it means to be His bride and view ourselves and He does... not an easy task. It's while we're betrothed to Christ — the Jewish ketubah—that we are being sanctified in order to become the bride He will return for; without spot or wrinkle. It's during this time that we are drawn to Him and away from the world, begin to trust in Him and not ourselves, and learn to love Him as He loves us. And our sanctification—our ketubah—requires that we submit to the teaching of the Holy Spirit so that we can move ever closer to becoming more like Jesus every day.

The second element is found in the book of *Hebrews* where the author (I believe it to be Paul) not only establishes our better salvation, he clearly shows us what the bride is to be doing during her time here on earth; during her sanctification. It's here that all the mystery of the Old Testament is clarified in Jesus Christ. Paul makes the case that Hebrew Christians who turn back to the Law at the cost of the Cross are heading down a path that is fraught with danger, and so it is for the bride today who turns back to the world.

How the bride lives and prepares herself for His coming not only determines how she'll live here on earth but there are also great eternal consequences when she stands before Jesus at His judgment seat and her works are judged according to what she has been given. The bride of Christ is not only His greatest treasure; she is to be His shining glory here on earth, a witness to a lost and dying world. Like the moon reflects the light of the sun, she is to reflect the light of the Son into a spiritually dark world. This she can't accomplish if she idly wastes her betrothal period on the things of this world. She can't allow herself to remain withdrawn into her chamber, slumbering in the face of His call to draw near because the number of her days draws short.

The third element is found here in *Revelation* where the bride is warned of the paths that can lead down the slippery slope of apostasy. We are shown the two churches that will dominate the time before the return of Jesus for His bride; Philadelphia and Laodicea. We are warned in these letters of the consequences of turning away from our first love and responding to the call of the world for comfort and pleasure. But at the same time we are reminded of the abundant grace of God and how willing He is to restore our relationship with Him if we will but *remember, repent and do*.

While these letters are strict warnings against falling away and following the world and its system, they are also love letters. Each one contains a call to repentance and restoration, even from the deepest depths into which she has fallen. Time still remains to *hear what The Spirit says*.

So, with this background and our objectives in mind we need to examine these seven letters and ensure that we will be the bride that Christ is expecting to find upon His return:

*Eph 5:27 That he might present it **(His bride)** to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it **(His bride)** should be holy and without blemish.*

CHAPTER 1

THE ONE REVEALED

Revelation 1

In beginning the research for this book the Lord shared with me the reason that He has asked me to take on the task. He showed me that there those who will not read the *Book of Revelation* because either they fear they won't be able to understand it or that they are afraid of what it says. Those who do read the book primarily do so for the prophecy that it sets forth. In both of these cases the most critical part of the book never gets read; the first three chapters.

Chapters 1 through 3 set the full purpose for the book and clearly define the One who is relating it to John. While chapters 4 through 22 are by no means to be ignored, they follow the critical messages that Christ Himself—at the direction of the Father—delivered to His bride. These are epistles that come directly from the lips of Jesus and those who fail to read them are missing one of the greatest blessings in the Bible.

While the messages to these seven churches in Asia are our focus, it's important that we examine a portion of Chapter 1 as it relates to the subject, purpose, and meaning of the book. To that end there are a few verses for us to consider as they impact what we're going to have revealed to us in Chapters 2 and 3.

When we read this fascinating vision we must be on the alert to not get wrapped up in the “pictures” our minds will conjure up but focus on the message that is revealed. To do that we need to view this book with an eye to not only see the portrayal of God's character but in a similar fashion we will be introduced to ourselves; our own worth, the meaning of our lives, and the task we have at hand while living in this world.

Now, as we begin our journey down the old Roman Postal Route in Asia, the first five words of Chapter 1 tell us all we need to know—it's a Messianic book. The prophecy contained in the book is important but we need make no mistake about the primary subject:

*Rev 1:1(a) The Revelation of **Jesus Christ** ...*

The word revelation (*apokalupsis*) is singular and is the radical discovering, unveiling or uncovering of something that was previously hidden. And we are immediately told that this surprising and radical breakthrough is the revelation—the unveiling—of Jesus Christ. We have seen Jesus come as a lamb to be sacrificed with His glory veiled, but here we see Him come as our sovereign Lord to be crowned the King of Kings. He first came to be judged but when He comes again it will be “to judge.” He walked among us enduring shame but the next time we see Him it will be in His full splendor, no longer redeeming as a servant but reigning as the sovereign of all. And so we move from the Gospels as related by man to this incredible message delivered directly to us from the lips of none other than the Son of God, the Lord of all.

As we explore just a small part of this wonderful book we will be blessed not only by the revelation of His message to us but also by the revelation of Jesus Himself. It is a message from God the Father to the Son, sent by the archangel to His witness John for delivery to us, His servants (*doulos*). *Doulos* in the Greek and *ebedh* in Hebrew both mean bond-slave; one who is free to go but chooses to stay with his master. That meaning is clearly expressed for us in the words of Peter to our Lord at a time when many felt it was too hard and walked away:

*John 6:67-69 Then said Jesus unto the twelve, **Will ye also go away?** 68 Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, **to whom shall we go?** thou hast the words of eternal life. 69 And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*

Truly, to whom else could we go but to the one who gave His life for us. Therefore if we are His bond-slaves then this message is for us. It was to John that the mystery was revealed so that he might “show” those things which must shortly come to pass to us (*His servants*):

*Rev 1:1-2 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him **to show His servants** — things which **must shortly take place**. And He sent and **signified** it by His angel to His servant John, 2 who bore*

witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

First we need to note in this verse that God's purpose was "to show" His servants. This is not a sealed book, it is to be understood by all who read and hear it. Next, one of the things that have confused many in reading this book are the words "must shortly take place." The Greek translation is *die en tachos*, which means that "it is necessary that something will happen quickly or suddenly." This is not to be confused with "happening soon or immediately." Put in context it means that when the first event begins, things are going to follow rapidly. But note that these words are preceded by "must" (*dei; necessary, binding*). There is no option, no maybe, no perhaps, and no "if this then that." He also "signified" (*semaino; sign or token*) or rendered into signs those things which must take place; signs that fill the pages of the book. And it was John who "bore witness"—*martureo*; bared the record, gave a good honest report, testified—to the revelation of Christ. Next we are told that this book is a blessing for us "if"...

*Rev 1:3 **Blessed** is he who **reads** and those who **hear** the words of this **prophecy**, and **keep** those things which are written in it; for the **time** is near.*

The word blessed (*makarios*) as used here, however, means more than happy, fortunate or well off. In the Hebrew it is the word *ashar*, which means to "find the right pathway in the face of false pathways." Here we have presented to us the "blessed" pathway that is Jesus Christ, "if" we are obedient to what follows.

There are three conditions to receiving this blessing: 1) We must read (*anaginosko*; to know again), 2) we must hear (*akouo*; understand) and 3) we must keep (*tereo*; hold fast, observe or watch—keep like a full military line) the word of this prophecy (*profeeteias*; the foretelling of divine events by inspiration). The point here is to understand the word "blessed" in this biblical context. If we do then perhaps we might not use it quite as casually as we walk down the "pathway" that Jesus has set before us.

We must not miss the note of urgency as the word “time” (*kairos*) means opportunity or season; our opportunity to read, hear and keep is near. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (one of the few church leaders who stood in courageous opposition to Hitler and the Nazis) expressed the same urgency this way: *We live each day as if it were our last, and each day as if there was a great future because of Jesus Christ.*

Now as we move to verse 4 we see that these messages are directed to “real people” and not institutions as some would limit the context. The word for churches is *ekklesia* and it refers to “gatherings” or a “community of Christians.” In other words, real people in real places:

*Rev 1:4-5 John, to the seven **churches** which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace **from Him who is and who was and who is to come,** and **from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,** and **from Jesus Christ,** the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and **washed** us from our sins in His own blood,*

The other important concept to grasp here is that these messages are from the trinity: The Father (Yahweh; *I Am that I Am*), the Holy Spirit (the seven Spirits before the throne represents the “fullness” of the power and Holy Spirit), and the Son (the faithful witness). And how encouraging to see the Holy Spirit, who created the church (*Acts 2*) and has sustained her ever since, is clearly shown here standing alongside and within the seven churches as He is today in His “sevenfold fullness,” seven being the number of perfection; the divine (#3) combined with the earth (#4). His sevenfold fullness represents the earth “crowned” with heaven (*Isa 11:2*):

1. Spirit of Yahweh
2. Spirit of Wisdom
3. Spirit of Understanding
4. Spirit of Counsel
5. Spirit of Might
6. Spirit of Knowledge
7. Spirit of the Fear of the Lord

Now further note that “washed” as used here (*lusanti*) is to “set free” (*loos*) and is in the past tense (aorist active in the Greek). Remember the connotation of a bond-slave; one who is set free but chooses to stay. On the other hand, loved is actually in the present tense; *agapoonti* (that loveth). Jesus completed the act of “freeing” us by shedding His own blood and giving up His life and He continues to “love” us today and will in the future; something that can only be done by one who “is” alive. Yes, *to whom shall we go?*

The final part of John’s greeting is very important to understand because it tells us how Jesus views us; those He set free. It shows us the “lens” through which He directs His messages and as a result it sets the framework in which we are to respond.

Rev 1:6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The kingdom of God in the New Testament is not viewed as a “territory” but rather a “relationship.” Because we as believers have “chosen” to use our freedom to serve Him we have become His kingdom here on earth and as such He has made us “kings and priests;” referencing what God to Moses:

Ex 19:6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

Through His sacrifice, Jesus has given us royalty as the true sons of God. However, consider for a moment that the term kings most importantly means that we have been made kings first and foremost to God; kings on His account. As such we first must rule over our own appetites and govern our own spirit according to the Word of God before we consider our ministry of reconciliation or governing the world to come. And to help in that area He has given us direct access to Himself. As priests we have been given free entry into the Holy of Holies to offer up spiritual sacrifices, but unlike the high priest who could enter only once each year, we may enter at anytime. And in the capacity of priests we need to bear in mind Paul’s words to the Roman Christians:

*Rom 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you **present your bodies a living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*

This is what the prophet Isaiah saw in his vision for Israel and Peter's admonition for the church:

*Isa 61:6(a) But you shall be named the **priests of the Lord** ...*

*1Peter 2:5 **Ye also**, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, **an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices**, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*

Note that *lively stones* in the original is *lithoi zoontes*; living millstones or stumbling blocks. We are to be to the world around us the same stumbling block that Jesus was to the Jews. We are, after all, His ambassadors (kings and priests) here on earth and are to fully represent His authority. Consider that in the Old Testament there were only two places from which kings and priests could come: Kings from the tribe of Judah and Priests from the tribe of Levi. Now take that a step further and note that there are only three people in the Bible that were both kings and priests:

1. Melchisedec
2. Jesus
3. Believers in Christ—The Bride

That puts us in pretty select company, making *Rom 12:1* a very critical requirement in our life. Now, in that capacity, let's consider three more verses before we begin looking at the messages to the seven churches. First look at verse 10 with an eye to the critical time period into which Paul was to be taken:

*Rev 1:10 I was **in the Spirit on the Lord's Day** ...*

As termed here, the Lord's Day is not the first day of the week (Sunday), nor is it the seventh day (Shabbat); it is correctly translated *The Day of the Lord*. The word "Lord's" is an adjective and this expression was never used in the Bible to refer to the first day of the week (Bible Knowledge Commentary). In the Greek it is *en pneumatic en tee kuriakee heemera*; by means of the Spirit on the Judgment Day or the Day of Judgment. This is the day that Joel prophesized; the "day of His coming," which a day in future time and space.

*Joel 1:15 Alas for the day! For **the day of the Lord** is at hand; It shall come as destruction from the Almighty.*

*Joel 2:1-2 Blow the trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; For **the day of the Lord** is coming, For it is at hand: 2 A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness, Like the morning clouds spread over the mountains.*

John found himself "caught up" on that day:

*Rev 1:11-13 saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "**What you see**, write in a book and **send it to the seven churches which are in Asia**: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned **I saw seven golden lampstands**, 13 and **in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man**, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a **golden band**.*

What I want to be sure we don't miss here is the primary reason for this book. First, and this is critically important, Jesus tells John to look; what you see, tell to the seven churches. And what is the first thing John saw; *seven golden lampstands*. They represent the seven churches in Asia, likened unto the candlestick (*menowrah*) in the tabernacle with seven lamps giving light in the darkness (*Ex 25:31-37*). In *Rev 1:12* the word is *luchnia* (lightbearer). These lampstands (not candlesticks) are

bearers of light against the darkness, but they are not light in and of themselves; it is Jesus' light that they carry.

*John 9:4-5 I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. 5 **As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.***

Jesus left this world and “night” (spiritual darkness) will continue until He returns. Therefore, in His absence the lampstands are to bring His light into the world, which is our role in life and our challenge. However, read on and in verse 13 we find the key to meeting this challenge.

Jesus is standing, not on the outside or on the perimeter, but in the “midst” of His church (*mesos*; before, between, among, in the middle). And He is standing there in all His glory. The term *Son of Man* (used some 70 times in the Bible as in *Dan 7:13*) speaks of Jesus as the “God-man” walking on this earth; the Messiah. And He stands there in His priestly robe (*Ex 28:4*) *girded about the chest with a golden band*, which is His righteousness. What a picture.

Jesus tells John to look and see Him in the midst of His churches, clothed in a priestly robe of majesty and righteousness. These are not the clothes Jesus wore when He travelled through the hills of Galilee or on His journey to Jerusalem or on the Cross. These are not the clothes of a suffering servant but those of a king, a king who is in the midst of the churches, observing, watching over, helping, protecting, and defending; right where He is today.

It's from this position in the midst of these churches that Jesus delivers His messages, messages that are connected just as His presence in the midst of the circle connects the churches together. He is the only common center or common source of life for the church; the common center and source of life that holds His church together in the 21st century. It is from His position in the center that He sent these seven messages, and they are focused on our obedience to Him as “our” center, which is how the churches (we) will be judged.

This is how the Saviour of the Gospels now presents Himself to His bride. It is not only a message of confidence in His leadership but also a

warning of the growing signs of corruption and apostasy, which He “will not” tolerate in His bride—a warning and loving word to the wise.

In His love for His bride Jesus delivers seven messages that we need to view as warning signs as we watch and wait for His midnight call. These are mid-course corrections that are necessary to get us back on track; putting our house in order. They are clear warnings to deal with our spots (*spilon*; blemish), wrinkles (*rutida*; decay) and blemishes (*amomos*; fault or sin). The bride that Jesus desires to present to the Father is to be “holy” (*hagios*; morally pure, blameless, ceremonially consecrated).

*Eph 5:25(b)-27 ... even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself **a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.***

So here we have in Chapter 1 the “Person” of the book. And now we are ready to explore what He had to say in the 1st century to these seven actual churches in Asia, and what He is still saying today to those who would be His bride.

*Rev 1:19 Write the things which you **have seen**, and **the things which are**, and **the things which will take place after this**.*

What John “saw” was Jesus in His full glory, those things *which are* refers to the seven churches and the *things which take place after this* are all that follows “after” the churches; Chapters 4-22 (after the rapture of the church). The term in the King James is “hereafter” and translates as *meta tauta*; after these things (the things relating to the churches). Incorporated in what John has seen, is seeing and will see are the certainty of Jesus return, the past, the present, and the certain future that will take place.

In each of the seven messages in front of us is the demonstrated love of Jesus for His bride. He has not forsaken her nor has He abandoned her. To Him she has priceless value (*seven golden lampstands*) as the bearer of His light. However, she needs to be reminded that one day

when it is least expected the Father will send Him forth to call for her. The question is, will she be ready or will she have failed to trim her wick or run out of oil like the “foolish virgins?” Take a moment here and read *Matt 25:1-13* and keep that picture ever in the forefront of your thoughts as we progress through our journey.

We have not been left without a warning. Jesus said when all these things “begin” to come to pass—false messiahs, wars and rumors of wars, famines and pestilences, earthquakes in diverse places, false prophets and deceivers, increased iniquity and apostasy—“*then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.*” At this moment in history we all need to lift up our head and watch, but never forget where we’re planted here and there are things that we’re to be doing. I truly believe that our “house” is almost finished and we cannot fail to tend our lamps!

So, with the foundation set we will begin our journey of discovery with our first stop along the ancient postal route in the Roman Province of Asia at its chief city, Ephesus ... *The First Love*.

CHAPTER 2

THE FIRST LOVE

Revelation 2:1-7

The Apostolic Church

33AD to 100AD

*Then I saw in my dream, that when they (Christian and Faithful) were got out of the Wilderness, they presently saw a Town before them, and the name of that town is “Vanity,” and at the Town there is a Fair kept, called “Vanity-Fair.” It is kept all the year long; it beareth the name of Vanity-Fair, because the Town where it is kept, is “lighter” than Vanity; and also, because all that is there sold, or that cometh thither, is Vanity. As is the saying of the Wise—All that cometh is Vanity. This Fair is not new erected business, but a thing of ancient standing. John Bunyan: *The Pilgrim’s Progress**

Situated at the very center of the rich and extensive Roman Province of Asia, on the banks of the lush River Cayster just three miles from the Mediterranean, sat a city that was the gateway to Rome, a city the Romans called the Lumen Asiae—Ephesus, the light of Asia. It was the largest city in Asia with 255,000 inhabitants and it was on a traveler’s must see list in the first century. It sat half-way between Jerusalem and Rome on the ancient Asian postal route that also included the cities of Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Ephesus was also a “free city” because of its service to Rome and was therefore exempt from having Roman troops garrisoned there; perhaps the reason it boasted the “right of asylum” for criminals. It lived up to its name, Ephesus; *Desirable One*.

The city was founded in 1400 BC as a proud, rich port but it fell to Alexander in 334 BC. The city walls were five miles long and were

paved with marble. The Arcadia Way or market center was 1,735 feet long and 70 feet wide with shops lining both sides of the marble road, which was lit at night. The magnificent library of Celsus stood as testimony to the greatness that belonged to Ephesus in the early centuries. It's interesting that modern archeologists discovered a secret tunnel in the library that led to the brothels. The theater was 495 feet in diameter and seated some 25,000 spectators.

Ephesus was the “market of Asia” as all trade routes from the Euphrates civilizations terminated there. It had everything one could want and yet it was a notoriously evil city, a center of crime and immorality that boasted the Temple of Artemis (Greek); Diana (Roman). It was a huge temple sitting atop “Mount Pion”—one of the seven wonders of the ancient world—that contained hundreds of priestesses that were sacred prostitutes in the worship of the “bee goddess,” functioned as a bank for kings and merchants, and was famous for the Ephesian letters, amulets, and charms that were touted as remedies for sickness and bringing children to barren families. The temple sold many talisman souvenirs and charms and you may recall the trouble caused in the city by Demetrius the silversmith who led a mob against Paul in the theater at Ephesus (*Acts 19:24*).

It is interesting that the word “Pion” means... *Fair*. Ephesus was the wealthiest and greatest city in all Asia and was called the *Vanity Fair* of the ancient world by the Scottish theologian William Barclay. It was like the one described by Bunyan that blended pagan worship and Christianity in celebration of the pursuit of happiness. But it was so corrupt and evil that the Greek philosopher Heraclitus said that the inhabitants of the city were fit only to be drowned and that the reason why he could never laugh or smile was because he lived amid such terrible uncleanness.

And yet in the midst of this pagan metropolis the church had some of its most exciting triumphs. It was here that, 40 years prior to John receiving the Revelation of Jesus Christ, Paul ministered and wrote his letter to the Corinthians. His work was followed by Priscilla and Aquilla (*Acts 18:18*), Apollos (*Acts 18:24*), and Timothy (*Acts 20:29*). But here, just some 34 years after the founding of the church in the *Book of Acts* (63AD), we have the church at Ephesus struggling with the prejudices of the Jews, dealing with the pride of human intelligence, fending against

the influence of the popular idolatry of the day, and the effect of riches and sensual indulgence. The “leaven” was already spreading throughout the entire loaf (*Gal 5:9*) and the church was doggedly working against these evil forces. But in their exhausting efforts there were hidden and serious consequences that necessitated correction; correction from the very One who stood in the midst of and at the center of the church.

*Rev 2:1 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who **holds** the seven stars in His right hand, who **walks in the midst** of the seven golden lampstands:*

The first thing we note is that Jesus introduces a new concept to the first century church with His statement that He, like the high priest in the Old Testament walking (*peripatoo*; to tread all around, walk at large) to and fro in the temple taking care of the lamps, is involved in never-ceasing activity on behalf of the church. He is tending each and every lampstand in His position as our high priest, providing constant and vigilant supervision and ultimate authority. He “holds” (*krateo*; hold fast, retain, take complete hold of the entire thing) the whole church in complete control.

The point here is that if the church will submit to His control (follow Him) it will never go wrong. Each church and each member of the body of Christ is measured against that standard and therein lies our security.

*John 10:27-29 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and **they follow Me**. 28 And **I give them eternal life**, and **they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand**. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and **no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand**. 30 I and My Father are one."*

And because of where He stands...

*Rev 2:2 "I **know** your **works**, your **labor**, your **patience**, and that you **cannot bear those who are evil**. And you have **tested** those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;*

The church at Ephesus was a busy, dynamic, and energetic in doing the work of the Lord and Jesus acknowledges it. He knows (*oida*; understands) their works (*erga*; deeds), their labor (*kopon*; physical toil that takes every bit of physical and mental strength and involves pain and exhaustion) and their patience (*hupomoneen*; steadfast endurance that accepts suffering and hardship and turns them into grace and glory). The Ephesians had paid the price through their self-denial and they had been determined and patient in their efforts on behalf of the Lord.

Jesus also notes that they are disciplined and *cannot bear those who are evil*; those within the church who profess Christ but conduct themselves as unbelievers. They had no sympathy with the false doctrines and practices of those who called themselves apostles that were attempting to harmonize pagan worship and Christian faith. There were all kinds of those people in Ephesus, the very ones warned about in the Book of Acts:

*Acts 20:29-31 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 **Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.** 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.*

And by Jesus Himself:

*Matt 7:15 "Beware of false prophets, who **come to you in sheep's clothing,** but inwardly they are **ravenous wolves.***

It is the same for us today. It's not enough that we are diligent, we must exercise great "bearing" patience to endure the rebukes of circumstances and we must have "waiting" patience to receive His promise. In the process we must, like the Ephesians, "test" (*epieirasas*; examine prove) those who say they are apostles and are not.

*1John 4:1 Beloved, **believe not every spirit,** but **try (dokimazete; discern, examine, prove) the spirits** whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*

Jesus commended the Ephesian church that they had sought to have a pure ministry, one that was well founded and carefully examined the claims of pretenders and had refused to recognize those who were false pretenders; certainly an effort to be followed today.

*Rev 2:3 and you have **persevered** and have **patience**, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.*

To their credit they had borne up well (persevered) under their trials and had not given way to murmuring or complaining, and well they might have as this was the time of the second persecution of the church under the Roman Emperor Domitian. They were patient (*hupomone*; cheerful endurance) and didn't compromise with the world around them and tolerate sin; rather they endured the evil and labored against it, adhering to Jesus warning:

*Matt 26:41 **Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.** The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

We too must not relax but rather persevere against evil with patience and hard work. But as the Ephesians found out, this can be a slippery slope.

*Rev 2:4 Nevertheless **I have this against you**, that **you have left your first love**.*

The issue at hand was the fact that, in spite of all their good works, they had left their first love (*agapeen*; the God kind of love). Note that He did not say they that they had "lost" their first love; the word "first" (*prooteen*) means foremost in time, order or importance. In other words, they still loved but not with the same intensity. That first rapture of brotherly love was gone. In the early days of the church at Ephesus they had really loved one another but something had gone wrong.

The Ephesians had the earnest toil, the endurance and the orthodoxy or accepted view, but despite all the good deeds they had a heart problem; the love was gone. Perhaps they had just "moved on" in their progress to a deeper theological truth or maybe the love of God had just

been a good starting place but not the daily bread by which they were given life in the first place. So if they left their first love then what replaced it?

One thing that certainly played a part was “works.” It was their work and struggle that hardened them so that they forgot how to trust in the power of God’s love. They grew past the child-like dependence on Jesus that they knew in the beginning:

1 John 4:10-11 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

This problem starts very quietly and by gradual, hardly noticeable shifts of focus it results in the condition the Ephesian Church found itself:

- First the exciting love of a new Christian for Jesus and his or her new brothers and sisters.
- After a few years a move into leadership comes with responsibilities in the body of Christ.
- Then come church politics and decision making and the temptation to derive spiritual nourishment from the organization and power.
- Almost without notice the first love has been replaced with activity and church work; which never nourishes the spirit.
- In the end the Christian is totally preoccupied with plans, goals, and themes that would never have drawn him or her to Christ in the first place; the Ephesus Syndrome.

This loss of love and perspective is certainly nothing new to the Lord:

Isa 1:12-14 "When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts? 13 Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies — I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. 14 Your New Moons and

your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.

Consider works of Martha and the love of Mary in *Luke 10:38-42* or David and Solomon. David simply sought fellowship with God and is mentioned throughout the Bible (a man after God's heart) while his son Solomon sought wisdom and later became apostate; He is mentioned in Scripture with mostly derogatory comments. For us today it's no different. All the accepted belief and service aren't enough; Jesus wants His brides' heart as well as her head and hands. Contrast His message with the one that Paul wrote to them just 35 years earlier:

*Eph 1:15-16 Therefore I also, after **I heard** of your faith in the Lord Jesus and **your love for all the saints**, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:*

How many times have we seen new churches formed under the reviving influence of the Holy Spirit out of churches that have become cold and dead? Churches that are full of believers that have become so deeply involved in "church business" that they have slipped into being motivated more and more by the search for power and position at a terrible cost? Is there a solution to this dilemma? Yes and the formula is... **2rd**

*Rev 2:5 **Remember** therefore from where you have fallen; **repent** and **do** the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place — unless you repent.*

Jesus not only points out the problem but He also provides the solution. He points to three steps that will put them back on their original journey.

1. **Remember** (*menomonee* recollect or rehearse) like the prodigal son:

*Luke 15:17 “But **when he came to himself**, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!’*

Menomonee is in the present active imperative (immediate action); continue to be mindful. It’s a strong message to those who have let their love grow cold. Wake up and look at your surroundings. How are you living? Continue to remember what you had before you walked away in the pursuit of other “things.” It’s a message well put in the words of the poet and hymn writer William Cowper:

*Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word?*

The first step to correction is to realize that something has gone wrong and **remember**. We can see this clearly exemplified in the prodigal son (*Luke 15:19-19*) ... *when he came to himself*.

2. **Repent** (*metanoeson*; change your mind) and get your mind off of whatever wrong path you’re on; the path that you hope will recapture your original thrill. We need to admit (the hardest part of repentance) that the fault is ours and ours alone. Like it was for the prodigal son, it’s hard but when we do repent, godly sorrow will follow and lead us into changing both our heart and our actions. This is written in the first aorist active imperative; an urgent appeal to change. Consider the words of Joshua and Matthew:

Josh 24:15 choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.

Matt 3:1-2 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

3. **Do** (*poieson*; abide, bring forth, cast out, commit, execute, lighten the ship, perform, purge)—in other words, be Obedient! This is also in the same imperative; do it at once.

*Phil 3:12-14 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but **I press on, that I may lay hold** of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, **forgetting those things which are behind** and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Yes, we “must” fall on the mercy and grace of God but it doesn’t stop there. We need to take the action that the repentance calls for because there is “no” repentance when you keep doing the same thing. The proof will be a changed life that can only result from yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit. Only He can restore the love that has been left behind; the love that makes us who we are:

*John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you **love one another**; as I have loved you, that you also **love one another**. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have **love for one another**."*

*I Cor 13:2-3 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, **but have not love, I am nothing**.*

“Do” what you were doing when you were first on fire for Jesus. Go back step-by-step until you come to the place where you took that first false step and recover that zeal and love for Christ that set His heart in yours; if we don’t the consequences are grave.

Jesus told them that if they failed to repent He would *come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent*. That means that the church gave light in Ephesus (lit the spiritual darkness) and if Jesus were to remove the church (candlestick) it would

leave the city in darkness; the church would cease to exist. After its destruction by the Goths in 262 AD it never regained its former glory. The church “did not” repent and its candlestick has been for centuries removed out of its place; the squalid Mohammedan village which is nearest to its site doesn’t count one Christian in its insignificant population. The temple is a mass of shapeless ruins and its harbor is just a reedy pool. The city of Ephesus has been virtually uninhabited since the 14th century. However, Jesus did not leave them on that down note.

*Rev 2:6 But this you have, that you **hate** the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

What a strange word to associate with Jesus, but then if we love anyone passionately we will necessarily hate anything which threatens that person. But we must clearly note that it was their “deeds” that Jesus hated, not the people.

Nicolaitans is an interesting word; *nikao* (consume) and *laos* (people). They were a sect tied to the teaching of Balaam (*Num 31:15-16*) who prophesized the downfall of Israel from within by marrying into and becoming part of the world around them; worshiping their gods. Sir William Ramsay described their teaching as an attempt to effect a reasonable compromise with the established usages of the Greco-Roman society and to retain as many as possible of those usages in the Christian system of life. It was the very thing that the Ephesians were so strongly toiling against. Does it sound familiar? Perhaps they are symbolic of professing Christians who are introducing a false freedom in the church—licentiousness; abusing Paul’s doctrine of the grace of God.

*2 Peter 2:12-15 But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, **speak evil of the things they do not understand**, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, 13 and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. **They are spots and blemishes**, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, 14 having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. **They have a heart trained in covetous practices**, and are accursed children. 15 They have forsaken the right way and gone*

*astray, **following the way of Balaam** the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;*

Yes, we are ever to be on guard against false teachers that would lead us astray, but at the same time we are admonished to not let it become our focus at the risk of leaving our first love. But with this warning comes a hope.

*Rev 2:7 "He who has an ear, **let him hear** what the Spirit says to the **churches**. To him who **overcomes** I will give to eat from **the tree of life**, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."*

Hear (*akousatoo*) does not mean "to listen" but rather "to understand." And Jesus said it not only to the church at Ephesus but *to the churches*.

*Prov 15:31 The ear that **hears** the rebukes of life will abide among the wise.*

In Hebrew "hears" is *shama*; to hear intelligently with attention and obedience. We have that ability to hear and understand the things of God because we have been given the Spirit of God; the very same Spirit that was withdrawn from Adam and Eve in The Garden. It is the voice of the Spirit that reminds believers that those who overcome (repent) will eat from the tree of life that Adam and Eve failed to eat of.

It's interesting that Jesus puts this right down into language that they would clearly understand. Jewish tradition taught that the tree gave man life and one day when the Messiah comes and the new age dawns the tree of life would be in the midst of men and those who had been faithful would eat of it.

The Ephesians couldn't miss the intent. To the citizens of Ephesus the tree of life was a sign in another way. Their coins contained an engraving of a sacred tree used in the worship of nature, but Jesus reminded them that the source of life originates from a deeper reality than that which the cultic nature goddess images of their city offered. He offers the true reward—eating from the tree of life in heaven. What did the Ephesians lack? Love. What would they get if they changed their ways? The fruit of

the tree of life, the fruit of the Spirit—Love. They would have their greatest need satisfied.

The word “overcomes” is *nikoonti* and it is actually translated “overcometh;” the one who “does” overcome. And that person John clearly identified in his first letter, and it is not done by works; past, present or future:

*1 John 5:4-5 For whatever is born of God **overcomes** the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 **Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?***

The church at Ephesus is the first step down the slippery slope that ultimately leads to the church at Laodicea; the apostate church. It is a step that we do not want to take, and yet it is a step that here in the 21st century is very easy to take. We are surrounded by cities like Ephesus with every form of distraction and enticement. Many in the church are drawn by those enticements and many labor and toil against them, but in both cases the very love that brought them to Jesus is put in jeopardy.

*1 Tim 4:1-3 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times **some will depart from the faith**, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,*

There are many in the bride that find themselves in that very place. The years of toil and demands of life have stripped them of that first love. Oh they believe and haven’t “lost” their first love; it’s just been replaced with other things. And often it’s things that are built upon “good intentions” to accomplish something for the Lord. Can that love be rekindled? Certainly, or Jesus would never have bothered to address this letter to the church.

*1 John 4:10-11 In this is love, **not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.** 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

If you find yourself identifying with those who sat in the pews in Ephesus you can still take heart. God still strives with you, still loves you, and still waits to be gracious to you. You just need to take courage and start out fresh. If your love for Jesus is not what it was in the beginning and has grown cold toward others, stop and remember that first love:

*1John 4:10-11 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, **if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.***

It's that fervent, personal, uninhibited, excited, openly displayed honeymoon love. It is that same love between a husband and wife that begins to waste away when they begin to take each other for granted and life becomes routine. Is that where you are in your walk with Jesus?

The answer is to begin by remembering, repenting, and going back and doing your first works. Remember the words of Jeremiah:

*Jer 2:2 "Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: "**I remember you**, The kindness of your youth, **The love of your betrothal**, When you went after Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown.*

Remember is *zakar* in Hebrew and it means "still think on" like God still thinks on us and remembers how we first loved Him. Don't forget, you are the bride of Christ, the virgin who watches and waits. God told Israel that He remembered the love of their betrothal, that first wonderful and exciting love. For us it's exactly the same, that first love we had at the moment Jesus made us His betrothed. You can return to that place.

- Read the Bible like you did then.
- Pray like you did then.
- Serve like you did then.
- Teach others like you did then.
- Open your heart like you did then.
- Love like you did then.

Virtues that aren't used die out just like a sword becomes rusty when it's not used. But that sword becomes shiny once again when it's put back into use. The virtue of your first love is its simplicity and, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, it's a fragile thing that needs to be cared for:

2 Cor 11:3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

If we shift from the simplicity of loving Jesus to working for Him we will surely suffer. The Ephesians drifted slowly, imperceptibly into a relationship measured by their passion for action against the enemy. The result was emptiness in their soul that no amount of work and good deeds could fill; a state that went unnoticed by them but not Jesus. They had slipped so far down that slope through their “good works” that Jesus had to come and threaten to remove their church.

Are we any different than the believers in Ephesus? If we move away from our first love it's usually fueled—like most every sin in our life—by the desire to fulfill our selfish needs. Instead of building a relationship with Jesus that meets those needs we move out to gratify them and cover it with His name; self works. Contrast this with “love-led works” as Jesus instructed in this message: turn back to me again and work as you did before with love as your foundation. The difference between the two is subtle and dangerous. Self-led works lead to:

- Self-satisfaction.
- Misapplication of the “gifts” and prostitution of the anointing.
- Robbing the body of Christ of your needed gift.
- The draining of your strength; burnout.
- Frustration, emptiness and separation.

Christ-led works lead to:

- Inner peace
- Strength of character

- Direction
- Excitement
- Fulfillment
- Satisfaction
- Joy
- Wholeness
- Success

We all need to take the lesson of the church at Ephesus to heart and be ever vigilant because this first step down the slippery slope to apostasy is a subtle one. It's one that is most often taken without any knowledge of the path it's on or the danger involved. In fact it is a path that is never seen because that first step is almost always taken with the best intentions in the world. But it's a step that begins the process of trading the love of God for the works of the flesh; the love of God for the efforts of a "dead man." Jesus will not stay in a church where there isn't "true love"... nothing else matters.

*1 Cor 13:2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, **but have not love, I am nothing.***

Ephesus had great zeal for "truth" and "right" but they had a love that was in fatal decline. We can't afford to let that happen to us.

*1 John 4:10-11 In this is **love**, not that we **loved** God, but that He **loved** us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. *11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to **love** one another.**

**First Love Is The Abandonment Of All
For A Love That Has Abandoned All**

It's our choice!

CHAPTER 3

UNDER THE SIGN OF DEATH

Revelation 2:8-11

The Persecuted Church

100AD to 312AD

In the Bible, clouds are always connected with God. Clouds are those sorrows or sufferings or providences without or within our personal lives which seem to dispute the empire of God. If there were no clouds we would not need faith. Seen apart from God, the clouds or difficulties are accidents, but by those very clouds the Spirit of God teaches us to walk by faith. Oswald Chambers

The city was set just 42 miles north of Ephesus along the old postal route. It was an original Greek colony founded in 1,000 BC, only to be destroyed 400 years later by the Lydians (inventors of the coin). Then roughly 100 years later in 301 BC it was rebuilt by Alexander. Between 178 AD and 180 AD the city suffered a succession of earthquakes that reduced it to ruins. In 378 AD it suffered another devastating earthquake and the citizens rebuilt it themselves. They referred to it as the “city that once died but was alive again.” Today it is the modern city of Izmir; Turkey’s 3rd largest city with a population of 300,000.

In the first century the city of Smyrna was a very wealthy port city of some 200,000 citizens, one of Asia’s finest cities sitting on a major trade route from India to Persia to Rome. Located in the rich Hermus valley of modern Turkey it was known for its production of tobacco, grapes, figs, cotton, olives and olive oil.

It was a “free city” having cast its lot with Rome in 27 BC with the building of a temple to the goddess Roma, in 195 BC Smyrna was celebrated for its schools of science and medicine, for its magnificent buildings and wide paved streets and it boasted in the fact that tradition held it to be the birthplace of Homer (an honor claimed by others as well). It was variously called “the ornament” of Asia and “the flower” of Asia. Whatever the name, it was a city where culture flourished with its library, music, and theater and it also held the honor of hosting the annual games in its famous stadium.

The citizens of Smyrna proudly worshiped idols in huge shrines on the “golden street of the gods:” Cybele (earth mother), Zeus (father of gods and men), Apollo (god of light; sun), Nemesis (goddess of retribution), Aphrodite (goddess of love and beauty) and Asclepius (god of medicine and healing) to mention but a few. Temples encircled Mount Pago resulting in the title of the “Crown of Asia.”

It was a city founded on the worldly success it enjoyed at the hand of Rome and it readily accepted Caesar worship, in some cases making it compulsory. Each year every Roman citizen had to burn incense on the altar and publicly acknowledge that Caesar was the supreme Lord. In return they were given a certificate, which was very important politically. It was a vital test for the Christians in Smyrna and many of those who did not partake in the practice were burned at the stake, boiled in oil or fed to the lions. It was truly the bleakest period in the history of the church as the Roman Empire sought all in its means to eradicate the faith of Jesus Christ from the face of the earth. It was intolerant of those who refused to “view the world” through their eyes. Smyrna was the home of a church that had been put *Under the Sign of Death*; the consistent theme throughout this letter.

*Rev 2:8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, These things says **the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:***

In His opening words Jesus takes on the very thing that was underlying the treatment of His followers in Smyrna—pride. While those in the city believed that it was Smyrna that had once died and lived again, Jesus boldly proclaimed to them in this letter that it was He, *the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life*. The Jews that were

persecuting His church as well as the church itself needed a reminder that it was Jesus alone to which that title belongs:

*Isa 44:6 Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; **I am the first, and I am the last;** and beside me there is no God.*

*Isa 48:12 Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; **I am the first, I also am the last.***

Jesus experienced the worst that the world could do to Him and the Christians in that city needed to remember that no matter what happened He had already been through it. Not only had He been through death but He conquered it. He triumphed over death in every form and is now alive forever, having led the way beyond death for His followers. No, it wasn't the city that had conquered death, it was *The First and the Last*, and because He did He is able to promise the same protection from the second death to all those who follow Him. If they will but put their trust in Him they will have the assurance that they are beyond the reach of death; they "are" victorious" because He "is" alive.

*Rev 2:9 I know your **works, tribulation, and poverty** (but you are rich); and I know the **blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.***

Having comforted His Church by confirming that no matter the source or sponsor of evil, He is in control and they belong to Him. Jesus immediately commends them for their "works" (*huperperisseuo*; overflowing, in great abundance, beyond measure) and their "tribulation" (*thlipsin*; anguish, persecution). The word *thlipsin* carries with it the concept of "constant pressure," like a heavy rock on a man's chest, pushing until it crushes him.

Why? Because they were seen as socially unacceptable and insignificant and the Jews and Greeks were repulsed by the simplicity of their belief in Christ. They worshiped Jesus and refused to declare Caesar as Lord. As a result they were considered disloyal, and because of that persecution was almost more political than religious. Jesus wanted them

to know that He understood what it meant to be tortured, killed, burned in oil, burned at the stake, crucified or thrown to the lions. And in addition to their suffering Jesus recognized their abject poverty.

The word used here for “poverty” is *ptoocheian* and, in contrast to the word *penia* (poor), it means absolute poverty, beggarly or destitute. In the midst of this wealthy city they were penniless and belonged to the lowest class in society, which made them continually subject to being mobbed, looted, and robbed. But Jesus wanted them to know that poverty was no barrier to His grace. There are parts of suffering that are positive for us in the realm of the Spirit and they needed to remember that Jesus was poor and so were most of His devoted followers. Even today being loyal to Jesus often entails economic loss. Look at the parenthesis in verse 9. That says it all, a complete volume in one simple sentence. Jesus said that He knew their poverty and yet He saw them as “rich;” *plousious*—abounding with great wealth. I wonder, can we identify with that?

*Luke 6:20 Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: "**Blessed are you poor,** for yours is the kingdom of God.*

*2 Cor 6:10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; **as poor, yet making many rich;** as having nothing, and **yet possessing all things.***

The world considers wealth as the true measure of value, but Jesus considers our spiritual wealth as the absolute measure. We need to view our spiritual wealth as inalienable (absolute or unchangeable) in contrast to worldly wealth which is not. James put it well:

*James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brethren: **Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom** which He promised to those who love Him?*

God has chosen us to be rich in faith, the very faith that embodied the believers at Smyrna. They were rich toward God as contrasted to those who were persecuting them.

*Luke 12:19-21 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." 20 But God said to him, '**Fool!** This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided? 21 "So is **he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.**"*

And in their works they viewed themselves as being prosperous.

*1Tim 6:17-19 Command **those who are rich in this present age** not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be **rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.***

Those who invest in the kingdom are truly rich and have a promise (one already made) that will never be revoked, a promise that secures riches beyond their wildest dreams.

*2Peter 1:2-4 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, 3 as His divine power **has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness,** through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, 4 by which **have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature,** having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

Yes, Jesus acknowledged that they worked hard, suffered tribulation, and were destitute, but equally important He acknowledged the source of their condition. He directed His words directly to those who were guilty of “blasphemy” (*blasphemian*; railing and speaking evil). But don’t miss the fact that He isn’t accusing them of blaspheming against God. No, they were railing against the Christians in Smyrna. They were constantly being persecuted and had to endure the slander from the Jews, especially those who called themselves Jews but were so only by national origin, not by the true meaning of “circumcision of the heart.”

The Jews called themselves “the assembly of the Lord” and they would have no problem understanding exactly what Jesus was referring to; remember Korah? (*Num 16:3*). In the Greek the word synagogue (*sunagoogee*) means assembly or congregation, and Jesus said that while they call themselves the Assembly of God they are really the assembly of the “devil.” Here for the first time in Revelation the ultimate source of persecution of Christians is revealed—Satan.

Chuck Missler, in his commentary on Revelation, noted that there were three false doctrines sown in the early church that impact the systems and forms of religion we still see in many churches today:

1. **Legalism**—denying the “work” of Christ
2. **Gnosticism**— denying the “humanity” of Christ
3. **Caesar Worship**—denying the “Lordship” of Christ

In the words of Matthew Henry:

How dangerous are all systems and forms of religion which cherish and confirm the self-righteousness of human nature! How much worse than none at all! The weapons of religion are transferred, by these means, into the hands of its adversaries.

For the bride of Christ those words still ring true. We need to remember that Jesus knows that we all—in a unique and individual way—suffer for Him. After all He never promised us it would be easy.

*John 15:20 Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' **If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.** If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.*

As a result we should remember:

- Suffering for Jesus opens the door for us to ask for His help. We are but a “word” away from the throne of God, anytime day or night.
- Suffering for Jesus should embolden us in that we are an army that has a leader who guards over it constantly.

- Suffering for Jesus should make us extremely humble before Him. While He may allow us to suffer it's because of His love for us, a love we won't fully understand until we stand before Him.

I don't remember where this quote comes from but it certainly sums up our suffering for Him:

Are you a sufferer? To thee Jesus says, "I know." Is not that enough? The tear, indeed, falls downwards, but the sound of its falling flieth upward to the ear of God.

What that says to me is that we will never really know the power of God until we have been absolutely emptied of self-centered trust, have cast ourselves completely at His feet, and fully understand that true riches are not found in anything we have attained or have become but are only found in Him. Until Diane and I lost everything we had, all that "we had attained," and were forced to turn to God for everything, I had no idea how much He truly loved us and how truly faithful He is to those who love Him. It has changed my life forever and how I view the suffering I see around me in the body of Christ. Not one bit of it escapes His eye and each one of His who suffers is held tightly in His hand. Our problem is that when the pressure becomes too great, rather than falling at His feet we tend to fall into fear.

Rev 2:10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Immediately after acknowledging that He knew who was responsible for their persecution, Jesus told them not to fear. The actual translation is *stop being afraid, fear nothing*. He wanted them to take courage because they were rich in "faith" and "hope." He commanded them to be *faithful unto death* for the reward is far greater than the suffering they were about to endure. And not hidden in His statement is the fact that while He did

not promise them exemption from suffering, He did promise that it would not go on “forever;” the end of suffering will be the crown of life.

It was common to cast those who were persecuted into prison (*Acts 12:3-4; 16:23*). As John had been banished to Patmos from Ephesus, persecution was raging in Smyrna and many were being thrown into prison; *that ye may be tested* (tried with temptation). The same event is often both a temptation from the devil and a trial from God. From God’s perspective it’s separating the chaff from the wheat while the devil is sifting to try and show that there is nothing there but chaff.

*Luke 3:17 His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and **gather the wheat into His barn;** but **the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.**”*

God is the One who tests our faith to show to “us” whether it is genuine or not, He just allows Satan to do it for Him. We need to reflect back on verses 8 and 9. Jesus is there at the beginning of our trial and He will be there at the end.

The believers in Smyrna could have turned to the city that died and lived again for their comfort but they didn’t, they turned to the One who was there at the outset and would be there when it all came to an end. Why? Because He walked in their shoes, was their fellow sufferer and therefore all of their hope and riches were in Him. Are we any different and should we face our trial—whatever it is—in any other way? Why do we have trials?

*2 Tim 3:12 Yes, and **all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.***

- To glorify God *Dan 3:16-18, 24,25*
- To discipline for known sin *Heb 12:5-11; James 4:17*
- To keep us from falling into sin *1Pet 4:1-2*
- To build faith *1Pet 1:6-7*
- To cause growth *Gal 4:15; 6-11*
- To teach obedience *Acts 9:18-16; Phil 4:11-13*
- To equip us to comfort others *2Cor 1:3-4*

- To prove the reality of Christ *2Cor 4:7-11*
- For testimony to the angels *Job 1:8; Eph 3:8-11; 1Pet 1:12*
 Chuck Missler: *The Book of Revelation*

And the truth is that what we value most is where we put our heart.

*Matt 6:19-21 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but **lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For **where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.***

2 Cor 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

However, in the midst of our trial we always ask the same question; *how long?* Well, Jesus answer today is the same one He gave to the church in Smyrna; it will last 10 days. Some believe this represents the suffering of the church under the ten Roman emperors and others believe that it means “a few.” The point is, however, that while the suffering will come on suddenly, it won’t go on forever. In the first century that usually meant Christians might be left alone for a long time and then suddenly something would erupt around them and they would be persecuted or thrown into prison. And being put in prison was simply the prelude to death. It was only a matter of time and therefore terror for them was the continual state of “not knowing.”

The problem with suffering, even for a short time, has always perplexed Christians. We here in the 21st century, not unlike all the Christians that have preceded us, always expect the ungodly to suffer but should we? When tempted to ask that question we should recall that suffering is for the purpose of learning obedience. That’s what it was for our bridegroom and we should expect no less:

*Heb 5:8 Though he were a Son, yet **learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;***

Perhaps we should also be mindful of Jesus' last words in verse 10: *Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.* Isn't that what it's all about? As hosts of the annual Roman games those in Smyrna understood what He meant; a crown for the victor. Those participating in the games competed for a temporary crown, and while those who believe in Christ also run the race, it's for an eternal crown, a crown of life.

Smyrna knew what it was to be faithful to Rome but Jesus told the believers to be faithful to Him because His reward isn't temporal happiness, its eternal joy. Those words could not be more appropriate for a group of believers that witnessed suffering constantly and perhaps none more so than their martyred leader, Polycarp, who refused to disavow Christ and say that Caesar is Lord. Witness his final words as they prepared to burn him at the stake... he knew what crown he desired.

Eighty and six years have I served him and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my king who saved me? You threaten me with the fire that burns for a time, and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting? Come, do what you will.

And as they were going to bind him to the post he said:

Leave me as I am, for he who gives me power to endure the fire, will grant me to remain in the flames unmoved even without the security you will give by nails.

Smyrna, the city that died and thought it had come back to life. How appropriate that the name Smyrna is tied to the word myrrh, which was used in embalming dead bodies. It's sweet aroma was only brought about by "crushing it." Here we had the church, persecuted to death and surrounded (embalmed) by the same ingredient that Jesus was given at his birth (*Matt 2:11*) and was used at His death (*John 19:39*). It was also offered to Him on the Cross to numb His pain (*Mk 15:23*), which He refused as did the believers refuse the pull of Smyrna. While they were

experiencing the bitter crushing of suffering, their faithful testimony was like myrrh or sweet perfume to God.

This speaks volumes about what Jesus didn't say about the church at Smyrna. He did not have anything against them nor did He have anything to say about any special works or achievements they may have accomplished. His words to them should ring loud and clear in our ears... Don't Fear, Be Faithful.

*Rev 2:11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. **He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.***

How different is our reward than that of the world. The world "lives to die" and we "die to live." This phase—the second death—appears only here in the book of *Revelation* (also in 2:11; 20:6, 14; and 21:8). Knowing that we are spared the second death is all that we need to know to sustain us in our trials. When our earthly trial is ended we have the assurance from Jesus that suffering won't follow us beyond the grave, and His life is proof of His promise. Praise God that we don't need to fear or worry about the lake of fire. To the persecuting Jews in Smyrna the meaning was very clear from the Law:

Deut 33:6 "Let Reuben live, and not die, Nor let his men be few."

All the Chaldee paraphrases refer this to the other world: *Let Reuben live in life eternal, and not die the second death*; or the Jerusalem Targum, which says *Let Reuben live in this world, and not die that death which the wicked die in the world to come*. What does it mean for us? Exactly what Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans:

*Rom 8:38-39 For I am persuaded that **neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

So although our trials may pale in contrast to those of our brothers and sisters in Smyrna, we too may take comfort in the fact that we will not be “hurt” (*adikeethee*; unjustly hurt or suffered wrongly) by the second death—spiritual death.

1 Cor 15:55-58 "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Perhaps there are no better words to close this letter from Jesus than with those of Joni Eareckson Tada, who with a broken body and a glorious spirit captured the essence of this message to the believers in Smyrna and her brothers and sisters in the bride of Christ today.

God is a Master Artist. And there are aspects of your life and character—good, quality things—he wants others to notice. So without using blatant tricks or obvious gimmicks, God brings the cool, dark contrast of suffering into your life. That contrast, laid up against the golden character of Christ within you, will draw attention; to him. Light against darkness. Beauty against affliction. Joy against sorrow. A sweet, patient spirit against pain and disappointment—major contrasts that have a way of attracting notice. You are the canvas on which he paints glorious truths, sharing beauty and inspiring others. So that people might see him.

Maybe this is what Paul had in mind when he wrote his letter to the Ephesians:

*Eph 2:10 For we are his **workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

The word for workmanship is *poiema*, from which we get our word poem. Each one of us is the individual work of the Creator, wonderfully

made like the words of a poem. Paul used this word one other time in his letter to the Romans:

*Rom 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the **things that are made**, (poiema) even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,*

What then, as His poem, are we to do then when suffering comes our way? What is the message that Jesus has sent down through time to encourage us in our trials?

First and foremost we need to remember who is in control. While the devil may be the power that orchestrates the suffering, his power is limited. We too will have our “ten days” of suffering and we must face them for what they are as did the Christians in Smyrna, remembering that they are not always in God’s will. The freedom that God has given the world is the very thing that has made evil possible, but don’t forget that it has also made faith, hope, and love possible as well. In all cases this letter to Smyrna makes it very clear that the last word in all things belongs to God.

In practical terms it means that we are to stand up and face our trials no matter what suffering is involved. As the bride of Christ we are not to build up defensive walls and pretend that it isn’t happening. We need to call pain... pain. We have before us a crown of life and that’s all we need to keep us from losing hope in His promises. We don’t need to walk in fear. This promises contained in this letter are all we need to stand on. Every resource we need we have in Jesus and they are “all” that we need.

God has promised to keep us “from” His wrath as we explored in Chapter 1, but we would be in error if we were to assume that He is going to keep us from persecution. It’s the trials and challenges of this life that God uses to sharpen us and build our faith. It’s only through the fire of the trial that we are “tempered” and made strong in our spirit. We must keep the “crown of life” ever in our sight. It’s the joy He has set before us.

We cannot afford to allow the devil to steal the joy that is within us, the joy that is our very strength (*Nem 8:10*). The enemy uses fear to try and cripple us and keep us from walking in faith, but as I have said many

times, fear and faith cannot exist at the same time. We, just like those in Smyrna, are not to fear “any” of those things which we are about to suffer. Jesus will be there when it begins and He will be there when it ends—and it will end. Jesus makes no attempt to explain away suffering, it exists in this world and we can’t avoid confronting it.

There is a time of suffering for each of us and as the days until His return grow shorter that suffering is going to increase. As a whole, the bride of Christ has suffered persecution in the past and she will in the future. When that time comes for each of us let us reflect back on Jesus’ words... *do not fear those things which you are about to suffer*. As His bride let us wait and watch, not fearing the dark of the night because He has given us His lamp. Therefore, let us tend it carefully and be ready for His sudden call to come forth.

CHAPTER 4

TEMPTED

Revelation 2:12-17

The Worldly Church

312 AD to 600 AD

Compromise is but the sacrifice of one right or good in the hope of retaining another—too often ending in the loss of both. Tryon Edwards

Just 70 miles up the road from Smyrna, seated high up on a hill overlooking the Caicus River was the commercial and political center called the “greatest” city in Asia, the “illustrious” city or the “most famous” city. It never achieved the commercial success of Ephesus or Smyrna but it was the capital of Asia for 200 years and was a center of culture that surpassed both of them.

The city boasted a library in the Temple of Trajan that rivaled the one in Alexandria, Egypt with over 200,000 scrolls. In fact Ptolemy Epiphanes, the king of Egypt, was so worried that the library in Alexandria would be surpassed that he refused to export any papyrus, which forced the scholars in this royal city to develop material upon which to write. As a result they used animal skins to develop parchment.

This city, with all its culture, was also a great religious center with altars to Zeus and Asclepius, the god of healing referred to as Asclepius Soter; Asclepius Savior. His emblem was the two-headed serpent on a staff (the caduceus symbol still used in medicine today), an image that was also imprinted on their coins. It was also the center of emperor worship for Asia where all men were required to take the name of the Lord and give it to Caesar.

It was a time when the last emperor of Rome was dead and things were changing for the church as Constantine in his 325AD Edict of Toleration established freedom of religion. He didn't make Christianity the state religion—that came later under Theodosius in 378 AD—he just made Christianity legal. Theodosius was the one who forced the conversions that filled the churches with pagans, which effectively married the church and the world.

It was from this city whose name means citadel or fortified tower that heathenism, idolatry, and paganism radiated all over Asia. Of all the seven cities this was and by far the worst, the most evil with an atmosphere totally adverse to any effective Christian life and testimony... Pergamos—*the seat of Satan*.

*Rev 2:12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, "These things says **He who has the sharp two-edged sword**:"*

With his opening words Jesus immediately challenged not only the believers in Pergamos (*per*; mixed or objectionable + *gamos*; marriage) but all those who lived there and submitted themselves to Rome's rule. For their submission, Rome granted them the rare power of capital punishment, which was recognized by the sword. Roman governors were divided into two classes, those with the sword and those without, those with the right to use it at anytime and those who couldn't. Jesus addressed that authority by reminding them that His sword was more powerful than all the others and that it was drawn and ready. His sword is not only a symbol of judgment but is symbolic of the Word of God's twofold ability to separate believers from the world and condemn the world for its sin. It's both the sword of salvation and the sword of death; no heart is so hard that it can't be cut by the Word of God, dividing the soul and sinful habits.

*Rev 2:13 I **know your works**, and where **you dwell**, **where Satan's throne** is. And **you hold fast to My name**, and **did not deny My faith** even **in the days in which Antipas** was **My faithful martyr**, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*

Jesus said that He knew (*oida*; sees and understands) their works and where they dwell (*katoikeis*; have one's personal residence). This is in contrast with usual the word associated with Christians in the 1st century; *paroiken*—sojourner. The point here is that as far as the world is concerned they have made their “permanent” home in the city *where Satan's throne* is (seat); represented by emperor worship. This was the very thing that made Pergamos truly the worst of the seven cities. Even though the church was dwelling in such an evil city, Jesus noted that they held fast (were steadfast) and didn't run away during the past days of persecution. They were faithful to His name and were not ashamed of being Christians; they didn't flinch in the face of martyrdom. Jesus emphasized that by using the name of Antipas (against all) who He said was His *faithful martyr*. The word He used is *martus*, which is better translated as “witness.” During the persecution, being a witness was just a precursor to becoming martyr. But there is a deeper meaning here for the church. Rather than referring to Antipas' martyred death Jesus referred to him with the same name John used for Jesus in his opening words:

*Rev 1:5 and from Jesus Christ, **the faithful witness**, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth.*

While Antipas' death did not escape Jesus, it was His witness that made the deepest impression. It made a clear statement to the believers at Pergamos, which we will see in a moment when He called attention to their problem. That same point is valid for the church today. How many Christians demonstrate their Christianity in Christian circles but not out in the world where there is opposition? Sadly, the percentage is far from the 100 percent that it should be because Satan's plan today is exactly the same as it was then, undermine a Christian's loyalty to Jesus through persecution. The only thing that varies is the type of persecution he uses, and make no mistake; he is a master at using just the right temptation to get the job done on an individual basis.

*Rev 2:14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there **those who hold the doctrine of Balaam**, who taught Balak to put a*

stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

I've read this verse many times and each time I glossed over three very key words—you *have there*. Jesus cut right to the heart of the matter, they were “there” (in their midst). And “they” were the ones that were holding (*kratountas*; using strength to seize or retain) to what had been taught by Balaam (conquer the people) in *Numbers 31:16*; if you can't curse them, corrupt them. *The doctrine of Balaam* was the marriage of the church and the world, his “way” is covetousness and his “error” was to give up eternal rewards for temporal gain. This is what Peter had to say about these false teachers:

2 Peter 2:15 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

What was happening in Pergamos was the church trying to be all things to all people, and as such they were tolerating those who held those worldly views, allowing them to infiltrate the church and bring corruption into the body of Christ. Mixing the things of the world with the church was compromising the message and ministry of the bride. Jesus condemned those individuals that followed that doctrine and He also charged the church with tolerating them in its midst; compromising their purpose.

The filthiness of the spirit and the filthiness of the flesh often go together—corrupt doctrines and corrupt worship often lead to corrupt conversation. Matthew Henry

The most common word for Christians in the New Testament is the Greek word *hatis*, which means “different” or “separate.” But we can't be separate if we're constantly attempting to fit into the world around us. If we compromise our values because of “tolerance” then we get it wrong just like the Christians in Pergamos. Today the word tolerance has lost its meaning, even in the church. Rather than “allowing” someone their belief when it is opposed to ours, the world believes and accepts that we

must “accept” and “approve of” that belief or behavior. That’s exactly where Jesus found fault with Pergamos. They were accepting the teachings of Balaam by simply not standing up against them. Paul put tolerance in perspective in his letter to the Corinthians:

*1Cor 9:19-23 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. **I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.***

Paul didn’t say he accepted their view, a view that opposed the Gospel. He didn’t become a part of their world; rather he went into their world and met them where they were. He tolerated (allowed) their view because he wanted to be a witness to them but he did not accept it. He met them where they were, identified with them but did not become one of them. That’s a huge difference. On the other hand the Christians in Pergamos had gone too far as we shall see.

*Rev 2:15 Thus **you also have** those who hold **the doctrine of the Nicolaitans**, which thing I hate.*

Here we have the Nicolaitans that we met at Ephesus who promoted eating food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality. But unlike the Christians in Ephesus who stood against them there were those in the church at Pergamos who engaged them—*you also have*. They had them in their congregation and were accepting their views and teachings by not standing against them. Jesus made it clear a second time that He “hates” not the people but their deeds (*Rev 2:6*). Unfortunately His church at Pergamos didn’t and it brought about Jesus’ stiff rebuke.

*Rev 2:16 **Repent**, or else I will come to you **quickly** and **will fight** **against them** with **the sword** of My mouth.*

The answer is also the same rebuke He gave to the believers at Ephesus—repent—who He also warned that He would come *quickly*. Once again He used the same word (*tachu*; suddenly with surprise, without warning). Actually a better translation is *I will soon come to you*, which infers that I will “come against” you. And the “you” He was targeting were those who not only followed the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans but also those who allowed them to remain a part of the congregation.

And should He come His weapon is His Word; the truth. We can all clearly picture the Word of God coming in judgment, but it goes much deeper than that. We have such a loving Saviour that it is His desire that “none” be lost—*no not one (John 18:9)*. So His love reaches out with His Word to all those who oppose Him and those who tolerate them. It’s the Word of God that first convicts one of sin and then it provides an invitation to a relationship with Him through His love. And when that invitation is accepted it provides the assurance of salvation. Jesus will “fight” (*polemesoo*; make war against or battle—literally and figuratively) against those who oppose Him with His Word; the Word of Truth and the Word of Love.

*Rev 2:17 "He who has an ear, let him **hear** what the Spirit says to the churches. **To him who overcomes** I will give some of the **hidden manna** to eat. And I will give him **a white stone**, and on the stone **a new name written** which no one knows except him who receives it.*

Once again we see that word “hear” (*akousatoo*; understand). As Christians we’re called to decide in favor of God’s truth, but we’re not forced to decide in favor of it. It’s always the truth but it doesn’t become our truth unless we’re willing to hear, understand, and accept it. Understanding the truth of God’s word is the key to overcoming (*nikoonti*; conquering, prevailing or getting the victory). It’s the key to overcoming our broken relationship with God and our misplaced loyalty to the world around us (*1John 5:4-5*).

When we worship something other than God, confusion sets in and we get robbed of our own identity as His son or daughter of God. Some view worshipping something other than God as bowing to an idol. Well that's certainly valid, but what about worshipping the "situation as normal" or "not rocking the boat." Isn't allowing the world to compromise our values because it's "comfortable" also worshipping something other than God?

For years the believers at Pergamos had allowed themselves to enjoy the "social" comfort of the world around them. The years of persecution were gone and life was reasonably comfortable; live and let live (that sounds familiar). However, Jesus didn't see it that way. For Him it was a compromise, a way of avoiding the glaring difference between the world and His bride. Just holding to His name and our faith isn't enough. I love the way that He made His point as He closed this letter—right to the bottom line in words they could not misunderstand.

I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. In the exodus (*Ex 16:11-15*) God gave Israel manna to eat every day and a pot of it was put into the Ark of the Covenant along with the Ten Commandments (the stone tablets) and Aaron's rod. Over the centuries the Rabbis passed along a legend that when Solomon's Temple was destroyed it was believed that the prophet Jeremiah hid the pot of manna in Mount Sinai and that when the Messiah came the pot would be discovered again. To the Jew to "eat of the hidden manna" meant the blessings of the Messianic Age. To the Christian it meant entering into the blessings of the new kingdom in Christ.

In *Psalms 78:24-25* Asaph called manna the "grain of heaven" and the "bread of angels." This message from Jesus was that although you can't sit and eat meat that was sacrificed to idols (become intimate with the world and its system) if you withdraw from the practice (overcome) you will enjoy the blessings of heaven. No matter how you view it, the message is clear. Manna was a type of Christ, something hidden but to be revealed later. Today He has been revealed to us and we celebrate that fact when we view the bread of the sacrament as not only His body but the bread of life:

*John 6:31-35 **Our fathers ate the manna in the desert**; as it is written, He gave them **bread from heaven** to eat. 32 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For **the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.**" 34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always." 35 And Jesus said to them, "**I am the bread of life.** He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.*

I will give him a white stone. In the Roman world in which they lived the believers in Pergamos were well aware of the meaning of the black and white stones used in the courts of law that meant conviction or acquittal. When someone was acquitted they were given a white stone and on that stone was printed a new name reflecting the fact to all that they were absolved of the crime. It was also the custom in Pergamos for its citizens to wear stones or amulets around their necks with the name of some god written on the back, known only to them. It was to bring them strength and power over others with different gods. In other words if they had the god's name they believed they could control the power of that god for their benefit.

Jesus said He would give those who overcome a white stone, one that also represents a new status. However, the word He used for "new" was not *neos*, which means new in time but the same as before. He used *kainon*, which means not only new in point of time but also new in quality; nothing like it has ever been made before.

In Roman law a new status came with the new name, but that was something God instilled long before Rome. When man "overcame" in the Old Testament God rewarded him with a new name that held a very special meaning. He changed Abram (*high father*) to Abraham (*father of many nations*) and he changed Jacob from the *heel catcher* or *supplanter* to Israel (*he will rule as God*). We have also been given a white stone with a new name written on it; a whole new status and a whole new self. We have been given Jesus' own name, a name now hidden from the world but to be revealed to all in the future. In the meantime we, as

believers in Christ, have the responsibility to reveal His name to those in our part of His kingdom.

*Col 3:10-11 and have **put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, 11** where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.*

So here we have at Pergamos the church that succumbed to the temptation of the world. With persecution generally a thing of the past the Roman emperor Constantine, after seeing a shining cross in the sky and then defeating Maxentius his rival for the empire, established freedom of religion. The Christians responded by forming an alliance with him, which created an unholy relationship (marriage) between the church and the state. Then Theodosius turned pagan temples into churches, but in order not to offend the priests he allowed them to integrate their temple worship with Christianity. It was not a difficult thing to accomplish as the persecution was primarily over and the Christians had become more comfortable in society. He simply found “common ground” and a marriage took place. He even changed the coin of the realm and put Christian symbols on one side and pagan symbols on the other. For the next 300 years the two became a strong political force while the church began a downward slide from which it has never fully recovered.

Jesus made it clear in this letter that His bride must say no to those who that are not committed to Him would become part of her. She must remain separate from the materialistic philosophy of the world for if she marries the world she cannot keep the integrity of her faith. She must not join with the world and adopt its ways, seeking political change when the world seems upside down rather than first and foremost standing for the One and only One who can truly change it. Her charge is to avoid desiring to become a part of the world to make her voice heard; the Doctrine of Balaam.

Now I know I just stepped on some toes—don’t take it personally because Jesus stepped on mine and they still hurt a little. Am I saying that we are not to stand up for what we believe and use our right as a

citizen of this country and vote with our voice and our pen to protect everything this country was founded upon? No! What I am saying is that when we succumb to the temptation to jump in with both feet at the expense of our calling in life it's a taking the same step as the church in Pergamos. Putting our faith in man and his systems is the first step in the wrong direction because our focus will become set on the "things of this world." It is a slippery slope to the pit of compromise.

We have been called to a higher purpose and our strength is not of this world. We don't have the same values and when we compromise them we are entering into a marriage with the world when we're already betrothed to the King of Kings. We need to remember what happened to the believers in Pergamos when the church and politics got into bed together; the church was the loser. Our focus needs to be on the kingdom and not the world; our passions need to be focused on Jesus and His mission. This is a message to those who are tempted to compromise their loyalty to Christ to gain the favor of the pagan gods—the material and fleshly gods of this world. Remember what happened to Solomon when the lure of the world became his priority:

*1 Kings 11:4-8 For it was so, when Solomon was old, that **his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God,** as was the heart of his father David. 5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6 **Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord,** and **did not fully follow the Lord,** as did his father David. 7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. 8 And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.*

And we all remember Solomon's words at the end:

*Ecc 1:12-14 I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And **I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven;** this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. 14 **I have seen all***

the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

We should never let our social environment shape our lives. Remember what happened to Lot. First he looked and desired the material benefits of the world, next we saw him camped outside of the city and then we found him living in the city. It was a process that eventually found him melted into the world around him and he became so content among ungodly people that he was no longer a believable witness for God. He allowed his environment to impact him rather than impacting his environment for God. Do those who know us see a witness (a martyr) for Jesus or are we just one of the crowd? Lot compromised his life and that of his family to such a point that he was almost useless to God. Remember when he finally came to himself and made a stand against the pagans in the city they didn't even pay any attention to him. We can't allow what happened in Sodom and Gomorrah and Pergamos to happen to the bride of Christ.

If we are going to make a difference in the world around us we first have to determine to be different. We cannot allow circumstances or situations force us to compromise. As noted previously, Paul told us not to form binding relationships with unbelievers, and that goes for the world in general. We need to be active witnesses for Jesus to the non-believing world around us, but that can't happen if we compromise our faith for the sake of comfort in an attempt to avoid confrontation and persecution. If we do, it's the first step in allowing the world to enter into the church, and like the church at Pergamos we will be more influenced by the world than we are likely to influence it.

Faced with just that kind of pressure, Solomon resisted it at first and maintained his faith. Then he began tolerating a widespread practice of idolatry in his own wives and as a result he became involved in idolatrous worship. Let's not let that happen to us at this moment in time when the world is seemingly coming apart and there is a strong urge to focus on the world's solution. We need to remember that we have the "only solution" and not to compromise the power of our witness by focusing on what seems right in the eyes of man. Christ offers us Himself and the power of His name as the means to overcome the temptation of the world. We have the hidden manna (the influences and comforts of the

Holy Spirit) coming down from heaven into our soul every day; manna that is hidden from the world.

Perhaps those in Pergamos forgot God's words to Solomon, words so important that God appeared in person to deliver them:

*2 Chron 7:14 if **My people** who are called by My name will **humble** themselves, and **pray** and **seek My face**, and **turn** from their wicked ways, **then I will hear from heaven**, and will **forgive** their sin and **heal** their land.*

Let us not be like the church at Pergamos—the married church—because compromise is often the first step to disobedience.

CHAPTER 5

IN THE MARKETPLACE

Revelation 2:18-29

The Adulterous Church

600AD to 1500AD

I argue that the Cross be raised again at the center of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of the church... that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a Cross between two thieves; on the town garbage heap; at a crossroads so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew and Latin and in Greek; at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where he died. And that is what he died about . . . that is where churchmen should be and what churchmen should be about. George MacLeod

The church in this period portrayed the medieval papacy, which was the move to establish and enforce the Roman church. And this, the longest message of the seven, went to the smallest church of them all. Located a day's journey south from Pergamos this former military outpost that protected the road from Pergamos to Sardis was a marketplace and commercial center with many trade guilds; leather-workers, weavers, potters, and bronze workers. It was here in the modern city of Akhisar that Lydia plied her trade of dyeing purple cloth, the same Lydia who met Paul and forever changed her life in Philippi (*Acts 16:14-15*). However, for all of its commercial success the city enjoyed from its guilds, the church suffered the loss.

The guilds each had common meals that were dedicated to their patron deities and Christians who refused to participate in the life of the guilds would find themselves isolated both economically and socially. Where there were guilds there was idolatry and immorality, two of the great enemies of the early church.

The citizens of this important military city were just beginning to achieve prosperity during this period and they highly valued wealth. Guild membership was compulsory, join or you were not allowed to work and the Christians in Thyatira were caught in the crosshairs of compromise.

*Rev 2:18 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says **the Son of God**, who has **eyes like a flame of fire**, and His **feet like fine brass**:'*

The importance of this letter is evident in the opening words identifying the source of the message; *the Son of God*. This is the only place it appears in the book of Revelation and is a clear reference to Jesus' deity as the Messiah:

*Ps 2:7 "I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, **'You are My Son**, Today I have begotten You.*

Perhaps this title is used in direct response to one of the key gods that was worshiped in Thyatira—Apollo the “sun” god. But unlike the pagan gods, it is the “Son” of God who will ultimately have the last word. His eyes are described as like a *flame of fire* (*floga puros*; flash of lighting). They are blazing anger against sin and they penetrate into man's heart like a laser to reveal that sin. His feet are like *fine brass*. The word used here is a rare one in Greek—*chalkolibano*—which speaks of an alloy of a number of metals that when polished was brilliant. The reference was to His purity and holiness, His steadfastness to them and His immovable power. Together His eyes and feet reflect discernment and righteous judgment.

Dan 10:5-6 I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz! 6 His

*body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, **his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze** in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude.*

It truly is the Son of God who knows all and will judge all, not the sun god Apollo.

*Rev 2:19 "I know your **works, love, service, faith,** and your **patience;** and as for your works, **the last are more than the first.***

We have seen these words of praise before: works (*ergon*; toil or labor), love (*agapeen*; the love of God) and faith (*pistin*; moral conviction—reliance on Christ for salvation). Their “inward works” resulted in “outward acts.” Love manifested itself in service (*diakonia*; ministry).

The church at Thyatira was fervent in its love, faithful in its service, and constant in its patience. Jesus even noted that in all these things they had grown: *the last are more than the first*. What they had was the very thing lacking in Ephesus; love. On the other hand, what Ephesus had was absent in Thyatira, and as we shall shortly see it was a major problem for the church.

*Rev 2:20 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because **you allow** that woman **Jezebel**, who **calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.***

Jezebel was a strong, evil influence that seduced and took advantage of the weakness of Ahab, corrupting him in the process of gaining power.

*1 Kings 16:31(b)-34 ... he (Ahab) took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and **he went and served Baal and worshiped him.** 32 Then **he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal,** which he had built in Samaria. 33 And Ahab **made a wooden image.** Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.*

In reality, she would not have banished the worship of Jehovah if the prophets of Jehovah would have accepted Baal “in addition” to Jehovah. That is what she wanted in Thyatira, a marriage of beliefs for power. She didn’t want to destroy the church so she brought her ways into the church—the ways of the world—to compromise its values.

The phrase *that woman Jezebel* brings up an interesting thought. The word used for woman is *gunaika*, which means “wife.” In all practicality here was Jezebel, the wife of the church, taking advantage of its tolerance just as the original Jezebel did with Ahab. It was all about power. She was no doubt a woman who through her influence and money bought her way into the church. She was a disciple of Diana and was gifted for leadership, which she used under the guise of being a “prophetess” to teach and seduce (*plana*; roam from the truth) the servants of God. It’s important to note that the word servants here is *dulos* (bond slave), a slave who is free to leave of his own accord but out of love for his master he decides to stay.

The problem, of course, was that the church was “allowing” (*afeis*; suffering, forgiving or leaving alone) her teaching in the church. It was allowing a person representing the “world’s system— a type of worldliness—free reign in the church. What wouldn’t work for Satan in Ephesus found a home in Thyatira. What she was teaching (eating meat sacrificed to guild idols and practicing sexual immorality) led directly to sinful conduct in the church, which incurred the anger of Christ. The English evangelist John Stott put it this way: *If the devil cannot conquer the church by the application of political pressure of the propagation of intellectual heresy, he will try the insinuation of moral evil. This was the dragon’s strategy in Thyatira.*

The Christians in Thyatira found themselves in a moral dilemma. They could compromise themselves in order to get and retain a job and food or stand firm for the truth. The trade guilds were well organized businesses with great power. In many respects it isn’t all that different today in companies that require their employees to engage in making efforts to feed the world’s fleshly appetites that force them to compromise their beliefs... Hollywood?

What eventually happened was that “tolerance” ultimately led to “participation” on the part of many in the church. And it was all being justified by Jezebel’s perversion of the scripture by her “deeper”

knowledge. Consider Paul's letter to the Corinthians. One can only surmise the twisted way this was used to support her doctrine.

*1 Cor 8:4-6 Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, **we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.** 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.*

Jezebel is the “world” and she is embodied in its “materialistic system.” Her doctrine is the same today as it was in the beginning and the results have always been the same:

*1 Kings 21:25-26 But there was no one like **Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up.** 26 And **he behaved very abominably in following idols,** according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.*

We only need to reflect back on Ahab's lust for Naboth's vineyard (*1 Kings 21*) and how Jezebel took the opportunity to arrange an inquisition and false witnesses to testify that Naboth had blasphemed God and the king, resulting in Naboth being stoned. Jezebel is a controlling spirit and sadly, history does repeat itself.

In the early 13th century Pope Innocent III proclaimed himself the Vicar of Christ, the supreme sovereign over the church and the world. He ordered crusades, proclaimed transubstantiation (the transformation of the bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ), instituted the inquisition, forbade reading of the Bible in the native language and declared the papacy infallible.

I know what you're thinking. If it is so obvious to us then “why didn't they just throw her out?” Perhaps not all of the pastors in Thyatira accepted her teaching but in an effort to be “liberal” and thinking that she might be able to help them they accepted her as a fellow pastor. After all, she was a “prophetess” and who was to question her.

Why not the church? Sadly we see this happening in churches in America today. There is something mysterious and beguiling in riches and power that makes people do things that are totally inconsistent with the Christian life. We only need to consider the issues of materialism, fornication, divorce, abortion, and homosexuality to start with. Unfortunately, many a worldly Christian has been allowed into leadership, bringing with them a false and evil doctrine as a direct result of money and/or charisma. There were those in Thyatira that were enchanted by Jezebel's deep understanding and were led astray. More than once throughout history the church—and the world—have been awed by someone's mysteriously deep teachings. But the good news is that there is still time to repent. Thank God we have Saviour who is longsuffering and patient.

*Rev 2: 21 And **I gave her time** to repent of her sexual immorality, and **she did not repent.***

I noticed something in this verse that says a great deal of how God looks at things as opposed to how we mere mortals do. Our response to Jezebel is to attack her false doctrine and the evil it contains and judge her for the lives she has corrupted and destroyed. As I am sure Jesus did, but notice that His first concern was with the fact that she had “not” repented. He gave her time (*chromos*; an uncertain space of time—not a fixed time) but she didn't heed His warnings and continued in her evil ways.

Repentance was, and still remains, Jesus' strongest challenge to the church. Dare I say that He wanted to see Jezebel saved, “even” after all she had done? I think there is a message for us in there.

*Rev 2:22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, **and those who commit adultery with her** into **great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.***

God is morally pure and anything that violates His morality will not go unpunished. Immorality destroys human relationships because it first destroys man's relationship with God. Some commentators understand *those who commit adultery with her* to be a reference to those who were

influenced by her and had compromised their Christianity. Unless they repented they were to be cast into the great seven year tribulation period (*thlispin megaleen*; prolonged anguish and persecution) called Jacob's Trouble (this is the first mention of the "great tribulation" in the Bible). Their treatment, should they not repent, was in contrast to the end of those who totally embraced her doctrine; verse 23.

*Rev 2:23 **I will kill her children with death**, and all the churches shall **know** that I am He who searches the **minds** and **hearts**. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.*

The death Jesus speaks of is not physical death (the first death) but spiritual death (the second death); eternal separation from Him. That alone should be enough to get one's attention but Jesus goes on to make it clear that by this action all the churches will know (*gnoosontai*; know absolutely—understand fully) that nothing slips by His "flaming eyes." He is the one who searches the minds (*nefrous*; kidneys—inmost thoughts, the moral center) and the hearts (*kardias*; total of all feelings, thoughts and desires traced back to one's deepest inner life) and will judge accordingly.

*Rev 2:24 "Now to you I say, **and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan,** as they say, **I will put on you no other burden.***

The doctrine Jesus refers to goes all the way back to their beginnings in Babylon. They migrated to Rome where they were combined with the Christian church and the result was priestly ceremonies, rites, and vestments, etc. In light of this, to all those in the church and in the city that have not known (*egnoosan*; not allowed, perceived or understood) Jezebel's doctrine—the deep things of Satan—Jesus said He would add no other burden.

First let's look at the issue of deep things. Jezebel's followers' prided themselves in the deep things, which they had mastered. They believed that they possessed mysterious information that the average Christian didn't know, as contrasted with the deep things of God. They were

Gnostics and their claim was that they exclusively knew the deep things of God; contrary to the Word of God:

*1 Cor 2:10-11 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, **the deep things of God.***

Her message may very well have been that the only effective way to confront Satan was to enter into his strongholds. The only way to fully understand the true nature of sin is to experience it because in doing so then one could truly appreciate and understand grace. Again a perversion of Paul's teaching:

*1 Cor 8:9-11 But beware lest somehow **this liberty of yours** become a stumbling block to those who are weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? 11 And **because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish,** for whom Christ died?*

Jesus brought this whole issue down to the only thing that should have mattered. The one command that had it been obeyed would have eliminated the problem. Remember when there arose a dispute among the church leaders concerning the Gentiles? What was the result? The Jerusalem Decree:

*Acts 15:24-29 Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law"—to whom we gave no such commandment—25 it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, **to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: 29 that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.***

Here was the “original burden” placed on the Gentiles by the Church, and Jesus reminded them that it was all that they needed to follow. He would put no added burden (*baros*; weight, load or authority) upon them. If they would follow the original commandment and trust in Him there wouldn’t be an issue of Jezebel. Now, not to pass this off lightly, it certainly wasn’t an easy thing for them to do when their economic livelihood and the food they ate came with “conditions” that Jesus said they must shun.

This is a challenge that every believer faces here in America in the 21st century. The spirit of Jezebel hasn’t gone away; it has only become more powerful down through the ages. It has always been about and will always be about compromising our Christianity for the world’s riches, comfort, pleasures, and you fill in the blank. One commentator at the turn of the century put it this way—little did he know it could have been written yesterday:

These doctrines, which John calls the depths of Satan, appear to have been the dogmas of men, and the conceits of sophisters (teachers) in religion, which were intended to render godliness more fashionable and agreeable to the taste of corrupt professors; and they differed from the simplicity of the Gospel in the ease they promised to those who embraced them.

Can there be a better definition of compromise: the doctrines of man that are designed to pervert the simplicity of the Gospel to make it more fashionable and agreeable. Oh how many times I have seen the power in these simple verses of scripture:

*Gal 3:1-4 **O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth**, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? 2 **This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?** 3 **Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?** 4 **Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?***

2Cor 11:3-4 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. 4 For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted — you may well put up with it!

Note that last phrase... *you may well put up with it.* This was the very thing that Jesus said the church at Thyatira was guilty of, as are many of the bride today. So what are we to do?

*Rev 2:25 But **hold fast** what you have till I come.*

Don't miss the fact that Jesus didn't tell them to "flee" this evil city and this evil woman and her evil doctrine. He told them to hold fast (*krateesate*; use strength to seize and retain) and be a Godly testimony to the city of Thyatira. He will deal with the Jezebels in this world and her followers and for the first time in these letters He makes a promise to the church... *till I Come.*

He reminded them that He "is" going to return (the first promise of His second coming), and in the interim they were to hang onto what they had because the very foundation of their salvation is worth hanging onto. He's saying that to us today. But if you're like, me there are those times when it's hard to hang on when I don't see Jesus in all His majesty as John did, because most of the time He appears to me in much smaller ways. As the writer put it:

He may not appear to you in His full tide of glory, as the Son of Righteousness, yet if He appears to you in the feebler beams of the morning star, ever remember that what you see, thought but a glimmering, still is light, real heavenly light. Hold it, therefore, in your view.

What that tells me is that what God has given us is all we need—His everlasting promise that He has conquered death, hell, and the grave and He is coming again to take His bride. Our only requirement is to hang onto that promise and share the good news with a dying world. And we

must not forget that He has given us His Spirit to help us hang on; *the comforter who comes alongside to assist.*

*Rev 2:6 And he who **overcomes**, and keeps My works until **the end**, to him I will give **power** over the **nations**—*

Here once again the words of *1 John 5:4-5* ring loud and clear. I love the word overcomes. It comes from the word *nike*, which means “victory;” prevailing to the end (*telos*; continuing to the uttermost). And if we are victorious Jesus will give us power (*exousian*; authority, jurisdictional power) as opposed to “potential” power, the power (*dunamis*) that the enemy has. This is His promise to His faithful bride, that she will join Him in His millennial rule:

*2 Tim 2:11-13 This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. 12 **If we endure, We shall also reign with Him.** If we deny Him, He also will deny us. 13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.*

But a word of caution is needed here. Many picture the church ruling over the Gentile nations as one would view royalty; a special class. Think about that for a moment. That is what Ahab and Jezebel wanted and we just saw what Jesus thought of that. Consider this next verse and it will help you keep it all in perspective.

*Rev 2:27 'He shall **rule** them with a **rod of iron**; They shall be **dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels**'—as I also have received from My Father;*

First let's look at where this comes from:

*Psa 2:8-9 Ask of Me, and **I will give You The nations** for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. 9 **You shall break them with a rod of iron;** You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.*

And that power will be granted to us for the express purpose of ruling over the nations. But look at the word rule: *poimanei*; to shepherd or tend. The word rod (*rabdoo*) means scepter or royalty. As His bride we will not rule but “shepherd” the nations with His royal scepter. So what about *rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces?*

The answer is in the words “he” and “they.” Consider for a moment that what Jesus has been talking about in this letter is paganism and heathen idolatry. It makes sense to me that “they” are who He is referring to here. All those who have opposed Him and not repented will be *dashed to pieces* and *He* is the one who will do it. As a result we dare not take this authority too far. We just need to remain focused on the key word that is in keeping with the Jesus I know; *poimanei*. His bride is to shepherd with a shepherd’s rod after He rules the nations with an iron rod.

Just one last thought here. If we’re going to be shepherding in the future don’t you think we should be preparing ourselves for that task now? We need to set aside the “ruling” part and focus on what a shepherd does. His rod is used to protect and correct his flock; not *dash them to pieces*. Yes we will be blessed to be part of His coming reign here on earth, but we must never lose sight of what that entails.

Rev 2:28 and I will give him the morning star.

Nothing could be clearer. If we overcome and keep His works to the end He will give us the morning star—Himself. I like the way David Thomas translates this verse: *I will give Myself to him, the light of life, the light that breaks upon the world after a night of darkness and tempest.*

Rev 2:29 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Once again in this letter as in the previous ones we are admonished to “hear” (understand) what the Spirit is saying to us.

Jezebel speaks of those who talk more about commercial success than they do about the claims of Christ. The Christians at Thyatira faced temptations that were tied to their skills and how they supported their

families. They were up against false teachings and social pressures from their workplace to participate or suffer the loss of work. We can take a lesson here and remember that the strongest challenge to the church doesn't occur in the public places but rather where we earn our money in order to survive. Under those circumstances then it's fair to ask the question—how are we to survive?

We need to see our daily lives in the bigger perspective and keep our integrity and faith intact. If we worship our job—putting it in front of our Christianity—then we're asking too much from it and not enough from God. He has to be—must be—the first and only source in our life. He must be our Jehovah Jireh; our provider. The moment we put our hope, trust, confidence, and faith in man or the world we are certain to fail. These are the things that take our mind and heart off of Jesus. Worshiping the idols of Jezebel and allowing them in our midst is the first step to participation, just one more step down that very slippery slope Jesus has been warning us about.

The error of Thyatira is possible today, we can also have idols. We can look to a person or a church program and put our hope and trust in that person or that structure. How many times have we seen a leader arise with some “special revelation from God,” some “deeper understanding” that the church doesn't know or understand? How many times have we seen Christians become “captivated” and follow after them, damaging their relationship—their marriage—with Jesus by leaning on their own understanding and not His?

I don't want to take up more space here but look at these scriptures from both the Old and New Testaments. Think about them and meditate on the message they carry. What God said to Israel, Jesus is saying to His bride. The message hasn't changed.

To Israel:

Jer 3:20 Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, So have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel," says the Lord.

Ex 34:15-16 lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to

their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice,
16 and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters
play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot
with their gods.

Deut 31:16 And the Lord said to Moses: "Behold, you will rest with
your fathers; and **this people will rise and play the harlot with the**
gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them,
and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made
with them.

Hos 9:1 Do not rejoice, O Israel, with joy like other peoples, **For**
you have played the harlot against your God. You have made love
for hire on every threshing floor.

To The Bride:

Eph 5:24-28 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let
the wives be to their own husbands in everything. 25 **Husbands, love**
your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself
for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing
of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a
glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but
that she should be holy and without blemish. 28 So husbands ought
to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife
loves himself.

Matt 12:39 But He answered and said to them, "**An evil and**
adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to
it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

Mark 8:38 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words **in this**
adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be
ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy
angels."

If someone walked into the church at Thyatira they would have been impressed with its work for the Lord, its faithfulness, and steadfastness. But something was missing. Today a church that is crowded with people and alive with energy isn't necessarily the "real" church. It's possible for a church to be crowded because people come to hear some charismatic individual, to be entertained instead of instructed in the Word of Truth or to be soothed instead of confronted with the facts about sin and salvation:

*2 Tim 4:3-4 For the time will come when **they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.***

Perhaps they belong to a Christian Club and not a Christian Congregation. No doubt those who lived in Thyatira and were very successful in business gave generously to the church. They looked like real Christians but Jesus saw beyond the surface. Jezebel taught that Christians ought to accommodate themselves to the world, which ultimately leads to spiritual infidelity that often expresses itself in physical adultery. The same thing happens today when we compromise our relationship with Jesus for the world:

The Challenge:

*Rom 12:2 And **do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.***

The Answer:

*Josh 24:15 And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, **choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.***"

Every day as the bride we are either getting better or getting worse because we are either getting closer to or farther from our bridegroom. These are the only two options sitting before us: either we choose to become more Christ-like or more self-like. There isn't an option to stand still, to stand pat where we are. Either we listen to the call of the world and compromise or we listen to the call of the Holy Spirit who tells us to hold fast to what we have until He comes!

In the beginning of this letter (verse 19) Jesus said He *knew their works* and the end of the letter (verse 26) He referred to them as *My works*. Our growth as Christians is dependent upon doing His works and not ours by bringing the world into the mix—compromising and confusing the issue. We need to remember the simple message of the Gospel and keep it that way. Once again the words of Paul echo loudly—*who has bewitched you*.

CHAPTER 6

LIKE A THIEF

Revelation 3:1-6

The Church That Was Dead

1500AD to 1700AD

The vast neurotic misery of the world could be termed a neurosis of emptiness. Men cut themselves off from the root of their being, from God, and then life turns empty, inane and meaningless, without purpose. So when God goes, goal goes. When goal goes, meaning goes. When meaning goes, value goes, and life turns dead on our hands.

Carl Gustav Jung

It was once the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia and its inhabitants enjoyed a voluptuous way of life. This commercial city was located just 30 miles southeast of Thyatira on a key trade route and was the center of pagan worship with a temple to Artemis, one of the nature cults built on the idea of death and rebirth. It prided itself on its huge necropolis—the “cemetery of a thousand hills.”

Physically it sat upon the Acropolis, which rose some 1,500 feet above the main roads and provided the citizens with an almost impregnable military outpost. But in its history this city, although well fortified, had been successfully conquered two times, both of which were the result of complacency and overconfidence.

The city was aptly named after a gem as its wealth was legendary. It was known for the art of dyeing wool, the place where the metal electrum (white gold) was procured, gold was found in its river, and it was the first place gold and silver coins were minted. But for all its worldly success and luxurious living it was a degenerate environment within which the church found itself a willing partner. It was a city of

peace but not the peace won through battle, it was the peace of one whose dreams are dead and mind is asleep—the peace of lethargy and evasion.

Perhaps William Ramsay summed it up best: *No city of Asia at that time showed such a melancholy contrast between past splendor and present decay as Sardis. And within this gem of a city was an overconfident church that was asleep at the switch. Just like the city, the church thought it “had arrived... self satisfied and complacent.*

*Rev 3:1 And to the angel of **the church in Sardis** write, These things says **He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars**: "I know your **works**, that you have a **name** that you are **alive**, but you are **dead**.*

First we need to remember that Jesus sent this letter to the “church” at Sardis and not to the corrupt inhabitants of the city. And once again we are reminded of all the references John gives us for its author, and critical to this letter is the statement that He has the seven Spirits of God; the sevenfold fullness of the Holy Spirit. Jesus knew their works and He has the infinite power of the Spirit to convict them of their sin, the present state of their deeds (works), which were far less than He expected or demanded.

The church had once been known for its spiritual vitality but Jesus saw it as dead. He told them that they had a “name.” That is a very telling clue as to the heart of the problem in the church. In the Greek the word is *onoma*, from which we get our word “denomination.” Jesus brought to light the fact that they were depending upon their denomination and their reputation in history, what they used to be and not on their relationship with Him.

They thought they were alive and healthy but in reality they were dead. The church at Sardis was the first church in history to be filled with “nominal Christians.” They were living proof that if a man accepts sin long enough there comes a time when he can’t accept anything else. His sinful habits grow so strong that they can’t be broken and his feelings begin to die. While Smyrna was put to death and yet lived, Sardis appeared to be alive but was dead.

Jesus chose an example they were well acquainted with as the Sardians were preoccupied with death and the practice had crept into the church; the necropolis, the city of the dead. The church had made such peace with the surrounding society that the Cross had lost its preeminence. That leaves us with the question, how did such a vital, spirit-filled church die?

The citizens of Sardis were living off past fame and so was the church. This was the emergence of the denominational church with its soft traditions, its denial of Israel's prophetic destiny, and the de-emphasis of the Gospel. Their loyalty and service to Christ was in the past and spiritually they had died. This is what brought about the Reformation and Luther and Calvin.

1Tim 5:6 But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.

2Tim 3:5 having a form of godliness but denying its power.

Moffatt translates verse 5: *Though they keep up a form of religion, they will have nothing to do with it as a force.* Phillips puts it this way: *They will maintain a façade of religion but their conduct will deny its validity. No matter how you put it, the church was so lethargic it failed to produce any opposition from the pagan world around it; its witness for Christ was dead.*

The church didn't die from persecution for a church can't be killed from the outside, it only dies from within. The greater the church is persecuted the stronger it becomes and the larger it grows. Sardis did have some who were alive but they were surrounded by those who were dead, those who had become nothing more than hypocrites.

A church dies when its individual members die and when it relies on its past reputation, which results in complacency and overconfidence. It dies when sin is allowed to abound. Many go around in the church wearing soiled garments and beneath their outward reputation is secret, unconfessed sin, which ultimately leads to relaxed moral standards in the church. But most importantly a church dies when there is a lack of spiritual sensitivity, when it fails to sense its own spiritual condition. Consider Sampson, he lost God and didn't even know it.

*Judge 16:19-20 Then she lulled him to sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. 20 And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" **But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.***

When the church, like Sampson, doesn't stand apart from the world around it and carry the challenge of the Gospel outside its walls it's a dead witness for Christ.

*Luke 6:26 **Woe to you when all men speak well of you,** for so did their fathers to the false prophets*

The church at Sardis failed to watch.

*Rev 3:2 **Be watchful,** and strengthen the things which **remain,** that are ready to die, for **I have not found your works perfect before God.***

Be watchful (*ginou greegoroon*) means be what you are not, be watchful, vigilant, or constantly alert—Wake Up! The first step toward renewal in a dying church (in a dying bride) is to wake up and admit the problem exists and then be watchful to protect against further decay. The Sardians didn't miss the message. Their city had been lost—twice—because of their failure to watch.”

The first time it happened was when Cyrus laid siege to the city. One of his men saw one of the soldiers high up on the Acropolis lose his helmet and crawl down a path in the rocks to retrieve it. Once the way was known Cyrus' army simply filed into the city and captured it. Their complacency cost them the city, and sadly it happened a second time in the very same manner. Jesus reminded them that they needed to be watchful because as their city fell so would the church fall. Like their high hill they thought they were standing firmly and strongly spiritually but they weren't. Their own history should have told them the results of being haughty and arrogant of standing on a false sense of security.

Therefore they needed to strengthen (*sterison*; establish steadfastly) those things which remained (*loipa*; a remnant, residue), their few remaining graces. The situation wasn't totally hopeless but they needed

to radically alter their attitude. Their complacency led them to give up their identification with Christ and their mission for Him. There is no word concerning conflict inside or outside the church, it simply didn't have the faith to witness to the city of Sardis. This is reminiscent of Paul's challenge to the bride of Christ:

*Rom 13:11 And do this, knowing the time, that now **it is high time to awake out of sleep**; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.*

*1 Cor 16:13 **Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.***

We need to watch out for the devil, watch out for temptation, watch out for false teachers, and watch out for Jesus if our works (love, faithfulness, perseverance, keeping His Word, and not denying His name) are to be perfect before God (*pepleeromena*; accomplished, fulfilled, fully preached or complete).

*Rev 3:3 **Remember** therefore how you have received and heard; **hold fast and repent**. Therefore if you will not watch, **I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.***

As we have seen in Jesus' previous letters, the very first thing to do is to "remember." They needed to remember what they had received; the Gospel at the teaching of the apostles and prophets. Not to remember how joyfully they received it but remember how it was originally given. In that way they couldn't deny having received it. Then they were to hold fast (present tense) with what they received and heard (past tense) and bring themselves to repentance. Only then could they once more start obeying the truth of Christ's Word.

*Col 2:6-7 **As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.***

*1 Tim 6:20-21 O Timothy! **Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge**—21 by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith.*

We need to be ready because the day of our bridegroom's return isn't known, and so we need to anxiously observe each and every day expectantly. Jesus told them He will come like a thief; a clear reference to the successful attacks by Cyrus and Antiochus. It was all the result of their failure to watch. We too are cautioned to be watchful for the very same reason:

*Matt 24:42-44 **Watch** therefore, for **you do not know what hour your Lord is coming**. 43 *But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.* 44 *Therefore you also be ready, for **the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect**.**

We need to be sure we don't miss the point here. Jesus told them to remember the importance of the Holy Spirit. They had made Him the forgotten member of the Trinity. I wonder how many churches (denominations and independents) have done the same today? The clear message for us is "get back to basics." The whole concept of creating denominations has caused us to compromise and in some instances lose the basics of the Gospel in the process.

*Rev 3:4 **You have a few names** even in Sardis **who have not defiled their garments**; and **they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy**.*

There is always a remnant!

Jesus used the idea of white garments, alluding to the fact that those found with soiled garments were removed from the public list of citizens in Sardis. It also refers to the Roman practice of clothing their nobles and victorious athletes in white. The pagan religion forbade approaching the gods with soiled or stained garments and the reference was to those who had mingled in pagan life and defiled the purity of their relation to Christ. Those who have not defiled their garments are those who have not defiled their Christian profession.

2 Cor 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and **to keep oneself unspotted from the world.**

These are the ones that will walk with Christ, which symbolizes salvation and fellowship with Him, something others had forfeited through sin.

1 John 1:6-7 **If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.**

White refers to wedding garments. In the case of the bride of Christ it represents righteousness, victory, and the glory of God, which are not to be dishonored. Our wedding dress is to reflect the righteousness we have been given on the inside on the outside for the world to see.

Eph 5:25-28 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 **that He might sanctify and cleanse her** with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, **not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.**

Those who have stayed true to the Word of God and have kept their garments white by the blood of the lamb will walk with Him in righteousness for eternity. But the Sardians were interested in outward appearance and not inner purity. That was the problem for which Christ admonished them. They were not reflecting His character in their outward moral life in a pagan society; there was no witness.

Matt 23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites!** For you are like **whitewashed tombs** which indeed appear **beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.**

Only those who overcome will wear white garments.

Rev 3:5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

And for those who overcome (repent) there are some critical promises. First, those who have a name that they live and are dead (verse 1) are blotted out of God's roll of heavenly citizens, but those who are faithful are not blotted out and will receive white garments from Christ as will those who overcome the stains of pagan society.

Second, their relationship to Christ is guaranteed. It was a message that made perfect sense to the Sardians. A register of citizens was kept in ancient states and all names were entered at birth, only to be erased upon death. It was also a common understanding in the Old Testament:

Ex 32:30-34 Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin. 31 Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! 32 Yet now, if You will forgive their sin — but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written. 33 And the Lord said to Moses, Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.

Ps 69:28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, And not be written with the righteous.

Isa 4:3-4 And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy — everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem.

Dan 12:1-3 "At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Everyone who is found written in the book. 2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise shall shine

Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever.

For Jesus to make this statement is the strongest confirmation that death cannot separate us from Him.

*Rom 8:38-39 For I am persuaded that neither **death** nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, **shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

Jesus told us that:

*John 17:12-13 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. **Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost** except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.*

*John 10:28 And I give them eternal life, and **they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.***

He promises us that He will acknowledge the overcomer (*nikoon*; overcome, prevail, gets the victory) before the Father and His angels. He will acknowledge (*homologeoso*; as in a confession before the courts) that our relationship with Him is genuine and ensures our place in His coming kingdom. But there are also some very stern considerations to ponder.

*Heb 13:5 Let your conduct **be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.** For He Himself has said, "**I will never leave you nor forsake you.**"*

First we are to let our conduct be without covetousness, being content with what we have. How hard does the world try and convince us that "if we only had" this or that we would be happy? How often are we tempted to covet "things" that others have and not only live "in" this world but to become a "part" of it?

Yes, Jesus said He would never leave us nor forsake us, but that doesn't mean we can go through life and not leave or forsake Him. This

is a box that has many sides and one of those sides says that our security in Him is by faithfulness and can only be erased by disloyalty. This gets us into the issue of free will; something our creator has given us that He never takes away. To the Christians in Sardis, Jesus made a comparison to the fact that a person's name could be removed from the city register before death if he were convicted of a crime.

I have pondered *Rev 3:5* and *Heb 13:5* (along with a number of other challenging verses) long into the night. It was not until studying for this book that the Lord shed some light on the subject. It all began with His asking me a question: *I said I will never leave you nor forsake you. Will you leave or forsake me?*

That began putting it all in perspective for me, and when I turned to one of my favorite commentators—Earl Palmer—his summary followed what the Lord was revealing to me. Is this the definitive answer? How do we balance eternal salvation and the erasure of names from the book of life? I don't have the answer and for that matter you will find in your study that no one does. On the other hand what Palmer has put into words rings true in my spirit because I have always had trouble with the concept of “greasy grace”... I said the prayer and I'm home free. I have never seen the issue more clearly defined:

What is clear in this text is that God's gift of salvation is received and heard, and it is kept by the faith of repentance (verse 3). It is, therefore, theologically irresponsible to theorize about a doctrine of grace that keeps our names in the great Book of Life against our will. The text is a freedom text. The letter to Sardis in no way diminishes the authority and saving power of Jesus Christ on one side, nor on the other side will this text allow the self-serving “easy-street” doctrines of general grace to reduce redemption into a general truth like the physical law of gravity. We simply must keep in biblical tension the all-sufficiency of Christ's forgiveness and the vital importance of our repentance. That repentance must be a present reality. It is not a transaction that we are able to occasionally acknowledge as we would the illustrious victories and achievements of our ancestors. Our salvation is a daily, living, dynamic relationship.

As Paul put it, we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling (*Phil 2:12*). Our Walk With God truly is a daily, living, dynamic relationship. A walk down the aisle and a prayer may be the initial step but without repentance there is no forgiveness of sin. The life we lead tells us where we stand.

Rev 3:6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

As individuals we are challenged to hear what the Spirit within is saying and respond accordingly. He is the one who has come alongside to assist us up the road of sanctification. It's a path with many forks along the way and only the Holy Spirit knows which ones we should take. There is no self-serving easy street.

Nowhere is there a better example of the miserable contrast between past splendor and present decay than the church at Sardis. Jesus' letter to them is a searching message to the churches today that are full of activity and housed in beautiful buildings but are lacking in any real evidence of the life of Christ—the life of the Spirit, eternal life. Christ's word to His bride today is “remember,” “repent,” and “obey,” just as it was to the church in Sardis. When we take a position that is counter to the Word of God and choose to go our own way in opposition to it, failing to repent day after day, month after month, and year after year, there will be a price to pay.

In closing take a moment and consider Paul's words to the Christians in Corinth, Galatia, and Ephesus. There are things in this world that we are not only to watch out for, they are to be rejected and avoided:

*1 Cor 6:9-11 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? **Do not be deceived.** Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.*

*Gal 5:19-21 Now **the works of the flesh are evident**, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions,*

dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

*Eph 5:3-7 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, **let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints**; 4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 **Let no one deceive you with empty words**, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore **do not be partakers with them**.*

Strong challenges? Consequences? Yes, and we would be well advised to heed them and remember that we haven't been left without the answer.

*Rom 8:37-39 Yet **in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us**. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*2 Tim 1:12 For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for **I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day**.*

Jesus will never blot out the names of those He has chosen. But those who have made a profession in name only will wind up being blotted out should they not repent. A name without spiritual life attached to it will be blotted out by its own self-fulfilled, self-confident, and self-absorbed life. To continue to rebel in the face of the love of Christ is to tread on very shaky ground.

Have you noticed in these letters that the common theme is the one issue that is most important to Jesus? It's repentance, and only His love is keeping the door open. But it won't remain open forever. Jesus' words to the church at Sardis should be a wakeup call. There is responsibility and accountability attached to our personal relationship with Him and they are not to be taken lightly. Jesus will never leave us nor forsake us. Will we never leave nor forsake Him? *Men cut themselves off from the root of their being, from God, and then life turns empty, inane, and meaningless, without purpose.*

CHAPTER 7

THE OPEN DOOR

Revelation 3:7-13

The Church Faithfull To Christ

1700AD to 1900AD

The Spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions, and the nearer we get to him, the more intensely missionary we must become. Henry Martyn

As we move some 28 miles southeast of Sardis we find ourselves in a city that was strategically placed along the postal route that was called the “Gateway to the East.” It was also called “little Athens” because of its many temples. While it was the youngest of the seven cities it was an important one to the Greeks because it became the center of missionary outreach to spread the Greek language and culture well beyond its borders. It was so successful in this effort that the Lydian language was replaced by Greek by 19 AD.

The city was located on the edge of a great lava plain called Katakekaumene (burned land), which provided fertile soil for growing the grapes used to make the wine for which it was famous. But it was also located on a fault line and was rocked over the years by numerous earthquakes and tremors; several were so severe that the city was destroyed several times. So fearful were the citizens that most of them moved outside the city for fear of the falling debris, living in a constant state of fear.

As a result, the city was rebuilt and had its name changed frequently: Neocaesarea (the new city of Caesar); Flavia (Roman family name);

Neokoros (Temple Warden); and then to Little Athens because of its festivals and pagan cults. Finally it came full circle and regained its original name with a church that had a vision to reach a lost world; Philadelphia (love of the brethren).

*Rev 3:7 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says **He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens"**':*

He who is holy (*hatios*; different, separate from) means the one who is different from man; the one who embodies the characteristics that God alone possesses:

*Isa 6:1-3 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. 2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one cried to another and said: "**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts**; The whole earth is full of His glory!"*

Therefore He is the One who has the right to call man to holiness:

*1Peter 1:15-16 but as **He who called you is holy**, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, "**Be holy, for I am holy.**"*

Jesus is also the One who is true (*alethes*; real as compared with something that is unreal) as opposed to all the false pagan gods. He is the One, holy and real God, the Creator of the universe and all that it contains, and as such He holds supreme power. We first saw that in *Rev 1:8* where we were told that Jesus holds the keys of hell and death. Now, to this missionary church, we are told that He holds an additional key; *the key of David*.

The key of David is a symbol of His authority, the authority of one who has the final word on who will enter into the king's presence and who won't. To the Jews it clearly referred to the story of Eliakim, who was given the key to the house of David; the key to all the treasure and only he could open it. It was given to him because the previous holder, Shebna, used the treasure to purchase a sepulcher and chariots for himself and the key was taken away.

Isa 22:22 The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall shut, and no one shall open.

In this context the house of David referred to Jerusalem, and here in *Revelation* it refers to the New Jerusalem.

Rev 21:2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

However, the door represents more than the city.

Rev 3:8 "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

The important thought to grasp is that the One holy and true God (Jesus), who has the ultimate authority (the key) to open and close doors, has opened a specific door for the church at Philadelphia. Jesus alluded to the missionary efforts of the Greeks as He told the church that He had opened a door to evangelism. It's the door that every church and every believer should be praying to have opened. It was Paul's constant prayer:

Col 4:2-4 Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; 3 meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, 4 that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

There is a missionary door for every believer that Jesus will open and we don't have to go to Africa to find it. That door is at home or in the office, anywhere within the circle in which we move every day. They are doors that no man can shut, no matter how hard they try. If the Lord opens it, it stays open until He decides to close it. To the Philadelphians this meant those who called themselves Jews (Jesus said they were not) that were trying to shut the door on Christianity.

But when Jesus opens the door we need to remember that it is the Holy Spirit that prepares the hearts of men to receive the Gospel—it's not our tracts, crusades, or witnessing. We must simply be where He leads us, to be the messenger to the right person at the right time. He is

opening doors for His “loving” bride to reach out to a lost world and He is looking for her to step through them, a step for which there is a great reward. That reward will be the same one that He gave to the church at Philadelphia for their faithfulness; He will open yet more doors and provide more opportunities for us to share the Gospel. But they won’t be doors that we are to walk through “shouting scripture” with the Bible raised in our hands. I think Paul hit the nail on the head:

*Rom 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you **present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.** 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, **that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.***

We are God’s “living epistles” and who we are reflects more perfectly “whose” we are than anything we may say. So remembering that, it is important for us to stay in a close relationship with the One who is opening the door, and that is only accomplished by going through another door that no man can ever shut; prayer. That door is always open because Jesus knows that in and of ourselves we can never get the job done. That is the job for the Word and the Spirit, we are only the messengers.

Jesus knew that the Philadelphians had “a little strength” (*mikran echeis dunamin*; little strength in one’s self or miracle working strength). He didn’t say, You’re Weak! He acknowledged that they were depending upon His strength, something Paul recognized and preached throughout his ministry:

*2 Cor 12:9-10 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **My strength is made perfect in weakness.**" Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For **when I am weak, then I am strong.***

Jesus commended Philadelphia because in their “little strength” they rested solely in His power and kept His Word, unlike the church at Sardis. And He doesn’t ask us or expect us to open heavy doors. All He

wants is for us to walk through the one's He opens. And it's a task that isn't hard because He empowers us. God isn't looking for or calling for super Christians, just the garden variety who are experiencing the love of Christ in their own lives and are willing to share it. When the world sees this type of love (*agape*) in the church (in the bride) the doors will swing wide open because the world is starved for this kind of love.

Not only did the church at Philadelphia believe God's word they kept it and didn't deny His name (His character). This church is the example for the bride to follow:

- They sensed their own weakness and walked in His strength.
- They were strongly committed to the Word of God.
- They maintained the integrity of their doctrine

As a result, doors of opportunity were opened for them. They understood that what keeps a Christian faithful is a vision of the world for Christ, a vision accompanied by action.

*Rev 3:9 Indeed I will make **those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet,** and to know that I have loved you.*

As in Smyrna, some of the Jews were the cause of the problem for the Christians in Philadelphia. Jesus also referred to them as the synagogue of Satan. They were a Jewish element that actively denied Jesus as the Messiah and persecuted those who believed. They were the direct opposite of Jews like Paul and John who viewed the true Jew as one who had found forgiveness in Christ.

*1 John 2:22-23 **Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.** 23 *Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.**

Those who say they are Jews believed that the Gentiles would fall and worship at their feet; a perversion of the word that God gave Zechariah:

*Zech 8:20-23 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: **'Peoples shall yet come, Inhabitants of many cities;** 21 The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, **'Let us continue to go and pray before the Lord. And seek the Lord of hosts.** I myself will go also." 22 Yes, many peoples and strong nations Shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, And to pray before the Lord.' 23 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'In those days ten **men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'**"*

Paul directly challenged the idea that these Jews were espousing, that Jesus was not the Messiah and Christianity was a false doctrine.

*Rom 2:28-29 For **he is not a Jew who is one outwardly,** nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; 29 but **he is a Jew who is one inwardly;** and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.*

To the church at Smyrna Jesus promised that the synagogue of Satan would not prevail against them. To the church at Philadelphia He promised that the faithful would even win some of them over and they would even fall on their faces and confess the Lord. Their conversion would be so profound that they would be willing to take the lowliest place in the church (*worship before your feet*, serving those whom they once persecuted rather than continuing to be a part of the ungodly synagogue.

*Phil 2:10-11 that **at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,** of those in heaven, and of **those on earth,** and of those under the earth, 11 and that **every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,** to the glory of God the Father.*

We see this same type of heresy today in reverse with Christians who say—in complete contradiction to the Word of God—that God is through with Israel and the church (Christians/believers) are now Israel. Nothing could be further from the truth. One only need read *Romans 9-11* or the remainder of the *Book of Revelation*. No, God is not done with Israel by a long shot and to take the position that the church is now Israel is strictly against the Word of God. There are three types of people in the

Bible: Jews, Gentiles, and believers; the church (the bride of Christ) who are all either former Jews or Gentiles.

*Rev 3:10 Because **you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world,** to test those who dwell on the earth.*

He who *keeps* will be *kept* is Jesus' promise to the faithful. The word persevere is also translated "patience," and it relates to the fact that we as believers are being established in the "patience" of Jesus:

*2 Thess 3:3-5 But **the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.** 4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. 5 Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into **the patience of Christ.***

It is also translated *My command to endure*, meaning that the promise is to those who practice the same kind of endurance that Jesus did when He was here on earth. His patience is our example and guarantee that He understands what it means when He requires us to endure. We are not to tire in our efforts.

*Heb 12:3 For **consider Him who endured** such hostility from sinners against Himself, **lest you become weary and discouraged** in your souls.*

In light of the fact that the church at Philadelphia did endure, Jesus promised them that He would "keep" them from the hour of trial—*hora tou peirasmou*; the time of temptation—that period the Jews called the Messianic Woes. We know it as the great tribulation that unfolds in the ensuing chapters of the book *Rev 14:7* that is also referred to in *Dan 12:1*; *Joel 2:31*; *Mark 13:14*; and *2 Thess 2:1-12*.

Some interpret this to mean that Jesus will not remove the church from the presence of evil but "keep" it from evil or the evil one. Others, as do I, understand Jesus to be referring to the rapture of the church, which occurs before that tribulation. As I have made my understanding of this issue clear in the introduction to this series, here I only want to point out one of the reasons for my decision.

I will keep you from is translated *tereo ek*, which means “out” of place, time, or cause. It’s an “exemption” from something—not to be present when something happens. This is opposed to the word *dia*, which means to keep “through” something; in the midst of it. The use of the phrase *hour of trial* makes it a time period, making it clear that they would be kept “out” of that time period. Christ’s method of keeping His bride “from” or “out of” the tribulation to come is to rapture her. In the Latin Vulgate that is *rapturos*; suddenly snatch away. God has said that His church will not suffer His wrath and that is exactly what is poured out on the earth after *Rev 3*.

The Jews understood the hour of trial to come because they always divided time into two ages: the “present age,” which is entirely bad and the age to come, which is entirely good. “In between” is a time of terrible destruction when judgment will fall on the whole world. Jesus’ message was very clear, those who are faithful to Him will be safe in His keeping, safe with Him and away “from” the coming tribulation. All of which makes verse 11 all the more important.

*Rev 3:11 Behold, **I am coming quickly!** **Hold fast what you have,** that no one may take your **crown.***

Once again we have that phrase: *I am coming quickly*. Jesus is going to come suddenly and when He does events will all unfold rapidly. We need to be prepared as we don’t know that day, hour, minute, moment, or twinkling of an eye. Here’s a thought to ponder. If a blink takes just 300 milliseconds, how long does a twinkle take (*1 Cor 15:52*)? I guess fast enough that it won’t make any difference to those being called.

This is the same promise made to the Christians in Thyatira (*Rev 2:25*), and it’s both a warning to those who do not heed His Word and an encouragement to those who do.

Matt 24:48-51 But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' 49 and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, 50 **the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of.** 51 and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

*James 5:7-8 Therefore **be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.** See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. 8 You also be patient. **Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.***

Here is a warning to all the bride to “hold fast” (*kratei*; seize by strength) to what they have (the doctrine of faith) so that no one can take their crown. Consider, however, that it is not about someone stealing it but a warning that God will take it from her and give it to someone else because she is not worthy to wear it. Go back and reflect on the parable of the “talents” that many consider only in light of salvation. Crowns (rewards or blessings), if you will, have been taken away by God and given to others throughout the Bible as a result of “unfaithfulness:”

- Esau lost his birthright to Jacob.
- Ruben lost his place to Judah.
- Saul lost his place to David.
- Shebna lost his place to Eliakim.

In this letter Jesus talked about open doors, evangelism. It’s all about the blessings of being faithful and trusting Him as you step through the doors He opens and share the Gospel. God has a task for every believer, but not every believer will prove himself or herself fit for the task. As a result, it will be given to another and the reward will be lost. Pastor Jon Courson captured the message here when he put a “face” on our crown in his commentary on *Revelation*. This should be both an encouragement and a challenge to all of us:

Crown? you say. “I don’t have one yet. What does it mean? I believe the answer is found in 1Thess 2:19,20 where Paul identifies the crown as people—people with whom we’ve shared, people for whom you’ve prayed. “Stay with them,” says Jesus. “Keep praying for them. Don’t give up on them.”

When God opens the door we will be well-served to never take it upon ourselves to close it; we do so to our own loss.

*Rev 3:12 He who overcomes, **I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God,** and **he shall go out no more.** I will write on him **the***

name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him **My new name**.

The pillar reference is to God's permanent, solid, immovable pillar in the New Jerusalem, as opposed to those pillars that came crashing down during the earthquakes that destroyed Philadelphia. It follows then that if the faithful bride will be a pillar in God's temple then she shall *go out no more*. The bride is promised a life of serenity in the peace she has in Christ, as opposed to the citizens of Philadelphia that had to run out of the city for fear of the buildings falling on them. The bride has security versus the insecurity of the world around her.

In Philadelphia when a priest died after a lifetime of faithfulness he was memorialized by erecting a new pillar in the temple with his name inscribed on it. Here the very name of God and the name of the New Jerusalem (signifying citizenship) will be written on the bride. The city that Abraham only looked for the bride will enter and live securely for eternity:

Heb 11:8-10 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 **By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country**, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 **for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God**.

The new name in this verse was a reference to the many times Philadelphia took on a "new name." Jesus said He will mark His faithful with *My new name*. What that name is we have no idea, but we sure want to be around when He starts writing it.

Rev 19:12-13 His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. **He had a name written that no one knew except Himself**.

All we know is that it's a name that signifies identification and ownership, a name that says to all that the bride belongs to Jesus. Jesus made this promise to the church at Philadelphia because it had both the right doctrine and was living it. It was important that they had both

doctrine and love, for doctrine without love is legalism and love without doctrine is humanism.

Rev 3:13 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Once again Jesus closes His letter with both a warning and instruction. It's the Spirit of God who brings both conviction of sin and the power and strength of repentance, the repentance that has been the underlying message in these letters. The church at Philadelphia is the living church of the end-times. It is the embodiment of all that Jesus expects of His bride:

- He knows our works, He knows we have kept His Word and not denied His name and because of that He will continue to set open doors for sharing the Gospel before us.
- He knows that we are depending upon His power and His strength in order to overcome our weakness and accomplish the tasks He sets before us.
- He will even open the door to the hearts of those who have persecuted us, the very ones His Spirit will prepare.
- Because we've kept His commandment to be faithful and press on to the end He will keep us from the terrible trials that will soon set before an unbelieving world.
- He promises us that He "is" coming back and in that promise we are to hold fast to what we have been given; to be faithful in fulfilling the tasks that have been set before us.
- He promises us that our position in the New Jerusalem is secure and it is sealed with His own name—we are secure in Him.

Over the centuries man has struggled with the commandment God first gave Adam and Eve in The Garden. That one commandment became ten at the hand of God, over 600 at the hand of man and was reduced to two at the hand of Jesus. It was those two that the church at Philadelphia—the church of brotherly love—understood:

*Matt 22:37-40 Jesus said to him, "**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**" 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it:*

'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' *40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."*

We would do well to emulate this church as it represents one of the two end-time churches. They were a missionary church that understood the power of the Gospel and the admonition to spread it among those living in an unbelieving world. They understood that their task was simply to share the Gospel and trust in God to provide the convicted heart and the power to restore it. It's our weakness and faithfulness that provides the platform for the power of the Spirit of God to touch the hearts of others.

CHAPTER 8

THE BEST PROMISE

Revelation 3:14-22

The Church With Unconscious Need *1900AD – Until The Trumpet Sounds*

The Hebrews regarded life as complete when it was full of days and riches and honor. Age was looked upon as a sign of favor. Whenever a nation becomes unspiritual, it reverses this order; the demand is not for old age but for youth. This reversal in the modern life of today is indicative of apostasy, not of advance. Oswald Chambers

And finally we come to a large city roughly 40 miles from Ephesus that was not far from Colossae and Hierapolis where the worship of pagan gods was widespread with temples to Zeus, Apollo, Asclepius, Hades, Athena, and others amongst a very large and wealthy Jewish population. It was also the wealthiest of the Phrygian cities and was particularly known for its banking, commerce, wool, its medical school, and its production of a famous eye salve called cellyrium. The city was so wealthy that when it was destroyed by an earthquake in 62 AD it refused help from the state and was rebuilt by its wealthy citizens.

The city did not defend itself well and as a consequence it became known for its political trickery, surviving by compromising with its enemies. As a result the citizens also learned to compromise and accommodate themselves to the needs and wishes of others. In fact they didn't stand passionately for anything, a state which the church made a part of its lifestyle of indifference and deception.

The name of the city means "the rule of the people," which was also a name well placed on the church. It was a church that no longer

followed its spiritual leader or the Word of God but was being led by the people. The church at Laodicea—*laos* (laiety) *diece* (decision or rule)—lived by the modern day motto of “I’m okay, you’re okay, just be happy.” The words “sin” and “repentance” were never uttered at the risk of upsetting someone and the peace they had established with the world. They dared not talk about suffering or persecution for fear of upsetting the apple cart.

There is no evidence that Paul ever visited the city but he was certainly concerned about it:

*Col 2:1-3 For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you **and those in Laodicea**, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

*Col 4:16-17 Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read **also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea**. 17 And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."*

Laodicea had in the midst of its wealth the neediest of the seven churches, a church full of indifference and spiritual deception, the “apostate” church, one of the two end-time churches. Is it possible that this church is alive here in the 21st century?

*Rev 3:14 And to the angel of the church of the **Laodiceans** write, These things says **the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God**:*

First it’s important—as we shall see later—that this letter is “not” to the church of Laodicea but to the leader of the “Laodiceans,” the one guiding and leading the church. The one who spoke these things was the *Amen*, the One that is *sure and valid*. He is also called the *faithful*,

referring to Jesus' unwavering and unchanging faithfulness, set forth here in direct contrast to the state in which the Laodiceans found themselves. Because of these qualities He is the *true witness*, the One who has seen and is competent to relate the truth.

*2 Cor 1:20 For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, **and in Him Amen**, to the glory of God through us.*

The term *the beginning* (ruler) is the Greek word *arche* (the source or origin); the head or governor of all things created, the king of creation.

*John 1:1-2 **In the beginning** (arche) **was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** 2 **He was in the beginning** (arche) **with God.***

*Col 1:15-18 He is the image of the invisible God, **the firstborn over all creation** (arche). 16 For **by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible,** whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And **He is before all things** (arche), **and in Him all things consist.** 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, **who is the beginning** (arche), the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.*

Jesus is the only one who has the full authority to address the condition in which the Laodiceans found themselves; the state of lukewarmness.

*Rev 3:15-16 "I know your works, that **you are neither cold nor hot.** **I could wish** you were cold or hot. So then, **because you are lukewarm,** and neither cold nor hot, **I will vomit you out of My mouth.***

I have put these two verses together to make sure that we don't lose the impact. Jesus immediately set out His issue with the Laodiceans, the fact that they had completely lost their spiritual bearing and influence. He used an example that couldn't be misunderstood by anyone in Laodicea.

In order to get water from the hot mineral springs up on Hierapolis down into the city the Laodiceans constructed a long aqueduct. But by the time the water arrived it was lukewarm, not cold enough to drink or hot enough to wash. It was useless but for doctors to administer it to induce vomiting.

His example made it very clear that if they were hot (*zestos*; hot to the point of boiling) He could use them or if they were cold (*psuchros*; cold to the point of freezing) He could deal with them. The problem was that because they were lukewarm—(*chilaros*; tepid to the point of causing nausea) like their main water supply—they were neither hot enough to use nor cold enough to correct. They were neither pagans nor Christians; neither good nor evil; neither being led by false doctrine nor addicted to the true Word of God. The bottom line was that they were listless and indifferent and didn't seem to care whether paganism or Christianity prevailed. They represented a paradox, they had little zeal for their own salvation or that of others but yet they were convicted of the truth and importance of Christ, which they weren't ready to give up. They were like the man who makes promises and professions that he will never realize and follow through with.

Their being *neither cold nor hot* refers to the mixing of the two that yields a lukewarm condition, a condition that is too easily mistaken for a safe state. They were useless to Christ because they were complacent, self-satisfied, and indifferent to the real issues of faith in Him and discipleship. The church, as a whole, was respectable but nominal and just skin-deep with religiosity. It had become irrelevant to the world around them and was generally regarded with complete indifference—sadly a state of the church, as a whole, in America today. Lukewarm Christians say they are standing for the Lord but they're afraid to be on fire. They don't want to be labeled as fanatics or extremists for Jesus yet they have no problem being overly enthusiastic about entertainment, sports, and life in general.

Rev 3:17 Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

The real problem was not simply their indifference but their ignorance of their real condition. The spirit in the world around them had crept into the church and paralyzed them, causing them to totally misread their true condition.

The mistake is often made by those who have an abundance of the world's goods. When they make a profession of religion they assume that they are well off in everything and are complacent and happy? The problem is that having a great deal of wealth by an individual or a church is more likely to produce the same lukewarmness that existed in the church at Laodicea; the very state of affairs that Jesus said was disgusting and abhorrent.

In all respects their material needs were satisfied. They felt they had enough of everything, which resulted in contentment, complacency, and indifference toward their spiritual needs. As it was then it still is today, those who are rich in this world's goods often feel that they don't need anything. It's an illusion among people here in America that if one can just attain wealth he or she will have everything. They believe that there isn't any need that can't be met with wealth; they can just sit down in pleasure and rest. Hence we have a pull from the world that encourages putting wealth ahead of everything else in the search for personal peace and comfort.

This was who Jesus is talking to, the *plousious* (abundantly wealthy) who are in fact most wretched (*talaipooros*), which meant being worn out and fatigued because of hard labor, like someone who labors in a stone quarry or in the mines. Jesus said that they were in the condition of the most abject slaves when everything one owns has been destroyed or plundered by war, instead of being the children of God they thought they were.

In His sight they were not only wretched but they were miserable (*ho eleeinos*; most deplorable, to be pitied by all men) and poor (*ptoochos*; paupers, absolute beggars). They had no spiritual riches at all. It was a condition sometimes used by the rabbis to express the righteous and the wicked. Their worldly property could not meet the needs of their souls and they didn't have the religion they needed to meet life's disasters, let alone death. In the most restrictive sense of the term they were poor.

In addition, they were blind (*tuflos*; physically and mentally) as the eyes of their understanding were closed they didn't see their actual

spiritual state. They didn't see the reality of their condition or the character of God. It reminds me of Paul's prayer for wisdom for the Ephesians, wisdom that was sorely needed in Laodicea:

*Eph 1:17-19 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 **the eyes of your understanding being enlightened**; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,*

And finally the Lord told them that instead of being finely clothed as they thought, they were in fact naked (*gumnos*; absolutely without clothing, spiritually speaking). Without the image of God they weren't clothed with holiness and purity. For a church and the bride I can't think of a more deplorable condition, but unfortunately it's the true picture of many churches and far too many of the bride today. They walk around clothed like Hans Christian's emperor and afraid to tell one another that they're spiritually naked. The Laodiceans were the exact opposite of the Smyrnans:

*Rev 2:9 "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (**but you are rich**)..."*

Poor, blind, and naked refer to the three sources of their miserable condition. It was the condition of not really knowing Christ as Saviour and Lord, and as a result they were in a state of being completely useless to Him. Yet the church was boastful and blind as it accumulated wealth and grew in power and influence in the world. How many churches and Christian organizations are focused on the power of politics today and not the message of the Gospel? How much energy is focused on Congress, the White House, and the Supreme Court at the expense of the Supreme Lord? David Jeremiah asks the question:

Will the last army of God consist of precinct workers getting out the vote? Will the soul-winners be replaced with petitioners going into the highways and hedges seeking signatures for some social cause? I am not saying that the Christian should not be involved politically.

We should do all we can to change what we can change, but that is not the mission of the church of Jesus Christ... its mission is the redemption of lost souls... we must not be sidetracked from this royal mission of God.

The Laodiceans had become lukewarm because they were blinded by their own self-confidence, a self-confidence that had turned them into spiritually empty vessels. They had overestimated their own wealth far too long and the only thing that was going to change that perception was the hard shock of reality, a shock that Jesus gave them. They needed to be told the difference between the state they were in and the state they should be in because they were incapable of seeing it.

Rev 3:18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

But their case wasn't hopeless.

1 Peter 1:7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

Jesus told them to buy from Him, not that they could by any work of their own purchase God's free gift. The purchase money Jesus wanted consisted of their renouncing all self-righteousness, all those things they thought they had in verse 17. They needed to count the cost of their self-sufficiency:

Phil 3:7-9 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

All of those things that they held so dearly were preventing them from having the relationship with Christ that would far outshine their alleged value.

*Isa 55:1 "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; **And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat.** Yes, come, buy wine and milk **Without money and without price.***

And what were they to buy? *Gold refined* (tried) *in the fire*. Jesus wanted them to come and receive from Him—without money—the faith and strength that would stand in every trial. What they had was only imagined wealth, but what Jesus offered was the only thing that would make them truly rich. He also offered them *white raiment* (holiness) to cover their nakedness, putting on fine apparel as a means of doing honor. There was very little point to their adorning their body with clothes made from their fine black wool if they had nothing to beautify their soul. This is an error all too common in the church today, a blindness to all that is important in Christ.

The *eye* was meant to refer to the inner conscience or the “inner light of the mind.” Jesus told them to *anoint thine eyes* in a direct reference to the eye salve they produced for which they were famous that made them wealthy. He wanted them to pray for the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit, for only then would they be convinced of their real condition and realize where their help was. The reference was with respect to their spiritual vision, what Jesus would furnish would produce the same effect as their eye-salve did for diseased eyes. The Gospel enables people who were once blind to see clearly the character of God and the way of salvation.

*John 9:25 He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that **though I was blind, now I see.**"*

The unction of the Holy Spirit, like ancient eye-salves, smarts with conviction when it's first applied but then it heals. Jesus wanted to open their eyes first to their wretched condition and then to His grace. What both Sardis and Laodicea needed was not their “eye salve” but spiritual sight, just like the typical modern church that is unconscious of its

spiritual needs and content with programs, beautiful buildings, and all the material things money can buy.

We are used to Jesus using the term *agape* for love, however here He uses *filoo*; gratuitous affection, independent of grounds for esteem in the object loved. In the midst of their lukewarmness Jesus reached out and told them that although they had not given Him any reason to love them He still did. But that didn't mitigate the action He needed to take.

I (*elengchoo*; emphatically), unlike man, rebuke all those that I love. It is the same verb John used in reference to the Holy Spirit:

*John 16:8 And when He has come, **He will convict** (elegcho) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:*

For those of us with children we easily understand the meaning. There is no surer way of allowing a child ruin his or her life than to allow them to do as they like. When we punish our children we do it in love and for the reason of pointing out their mistake. God's rebuke is just like that, not so much punishment as "illumination." When Nathan opened David's eyes to his sin, David's response is why I believe God referred to him as a man after my own heart:

*2 Sam 12:13 ... **I have sinned against the Lord.***

For David, nothing else mattered as he recognized that his sin was first and foremost against the Lord. Jesus also says that He chastens (*paideuoo*; instructs by chastisement). David was rebuked by conviction when he cried out but the chastening of God followed when his child was taken. As Matthew Henry put it: *In divine chastening, the sinner at once winces under the rod and learns righteousness.*

*Heb 12:5-8 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, **do not despise the chastening** of the Lord, Nor be discouraged **when you are rebuked** by Him; 6 For **whom the Lord loves He chastens**, And **scourges every son whom He receives.**" 7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But **if***

you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then **you are illegitimate and not sons**.

The meaning here is that the Lord's rebuke and chastening is proof of love on His part. If those He calls His friends go astray He is quick to recall them by rebuke and trial, just like we call back our disobedient children. There is no higher proof of our love than when with great personal pain we administer the board of education to the seat of learning to save them. Where do you think that lesson comes from!

The Laodiceans had become lukewarm in their service to the Lord and Jesus woke them up to that fact and admonished them that they should lose no time in returning to him, once again seeking his favor. His cutting judgments are but the expression of His deep affection that would lead them to repentance. Their answer to His call was to be zealous (*zeleuo*; enthusiastic) and they were to repent quickly. We need to heed that warning, a warning and an invitation not to the church at large but to the individuals within it, to the bride of Christ.

*Rev 3:20 Behold, **I stand at the door and knock**. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, **I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me**.*

Here is what makes God different than all the other gods of this world, He is a seeker of man—He comes looking for us. There can be no better picture than that of Jesus standing outside a locked door with no handle on the outside, a door that can only be opened from the inside.

Every man is lord of the house of his own heart; it is his fortress; he must open the gates of it, and he has the mournful prerogative and privilege of refusing to open. J.A. Trench

If Jesus hadn't knocked first it's certain that the Laodiceans would never have opened the door. Think about the picture painted for us of the bride and the groom in the Song of Solomon that portrayed this very thing:

*Song 5:2, 4-6 **I sleep**, but my heart is awake; It is the voice of my beloved! **He knocks, saying, "Open for me**, my sister, my love, My dove, my perfect one; For my head is covered with dew, My locks with the drops of the night." ... 4 My beloved put his hand By the latch of the door, And my heart yearned for him. 5 I arose to open for my beloved, And my hands dripped with myrrh, My fingers with liquid myrrh, On the handles of the lock. 6 **I opened for my beloved, But my beloved had turned away and was gone**. My heart leaped up when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.*

Here we have the bride who slumbers in her chamber and when Solomon knocks she is slow to rise from her comfort. By the time she opens the door he is gone and she cries out for him but can't find him. With Jesus on the outside there can be no fellowship, or as He showed to the Laodiceans, no real wealth. He is knocking on the door to His brides' heart, not the door to some stranger who doesn't know Him. That's a huge difference!

Catch the message here. He rebukes them and then asks them to dine with Him (*deipneo*; the main meal of the day), which in the oriental custom was a significant occasion for having intimate fellowship with one's closest of friends.

*John 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and **We will come to him and make Our home with him**.*

Picture it this way. In Jewish custom, if a stranger stopped by one's house toward the latter part of the day (the time of the meal Jesus is referring to) the owner was obliged to ask that person to come in and dine with them. Listen to David:

*Ps 23:5-6 **You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over**. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; and **I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever**.*

When you're invited guest was enjoying his meal you poured him a glass of wine. After the meal you poured him another glass and if you filled it half way it was a sign to him that it was time to leave. On the other hand, if you filled it to overflowing it was a sign that you wanted him to stay the night. Oh how rich are David's words: *my cup runs over—I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever*. All that we need to do is open the door.

So, outside the Laodiceans' door He stood, waiting to come in and have fellowship with any who heard His voice of rebuke and repented. Even though their lukewarm sin was disgusting and repulsive to Him there was still a chance for them. He was willing to be received and treat them with the hospitality that would be shown to a friend or stranger. The language here is so plain. The act of knocking implies that we desire admittance and that we recognize the right of the one inside to open the door to us or not. We would never intrude or force their door open. In fact we would do just the opposite. If we are sure that they heard our knock and were not admitted we would quietly turn away.

Jesus desires to be admitted to our friendship but He recognizes our free will and will not force admission into our heart. If we open the door He will come in and dwell with us, but if we don't answer He will turn quietly away, maybe to return and maybe not. Like the bride in Solomon's song, perhaps when we get around to rising out of our comfort (our slumber in the world) and open the door He may be gone. The spiritual state of the bride between waking and sleeping, being slow to open the door to her divine lover, speaks to the lukewarm church and the lukewarm believer.

Tragically there are people who go to church all their lives but never hear the message. They never deal with the issues of sin and repentance. To them there is a heaven to gain but no hell to shun. The only cure for a lukewarm church—a lukewarm Christian—is readmitting the one that they have excluded; the Holy Spirit.

I am reminded of a story about an old man who showed up at a church just before Sunday service. He was very unkempt and unclean as he was homeless. When he entered the door the usher came forward and asked him to step outside. He was informed that he would need to improve his appearance if he wanted to attend the service and as soon as he did he would be welcomed. The old man left with tears falling on his

soiled shirt and he sat down on the curb. A moment later Jesus sat down beside him and asked him what was wrong. The old man lifted his tear filled eyes and looked at Jesus... *they said I couldn't come in because I'm not clean.* Jesus put His arm around the old man's shoulders and smiled... *I know what you mean, I've been trying to get in there for the past 25 years myself.*

*Rev 3:21 **To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne,** as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

In every case it's to him that overcomes—the conqueror—that the final promise is made. Every promise is made to the one that is faithful unto death, and it's here that we have the Best Promise. Jesus has already conquered and is sitting down at the right side of the Father's throne and the one who conquers through Him will sit down on His throne. How astonishing that statement was after all that had been said to this group of believers. This is the worst of the seven churches and yet the most Blessed Promise of all was made to it, showing that even the worst can repent, finally conquer, and reach the highest state of glory.

Rev 3:22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Laodicea was a church that was popular and full of people with good intentions but it wasn't a place where the Holy Spirit could deal with sin and sinners. Its door was closed and yet Jesus patiently kept knocking out of love. And so He knocks at the door of the bride today, a bride that is unfortunately asleep like the Laodiceans. Sadly many of her are blind to their own needs and unwilling to face the truth, yet honesty is still the beginning of true blessing. When we admit what we are and confess our sins we will receive from God all that we need because of His grace. If we want God's best for our lives we have to be honest with Him. He is always honest with us and what He pointed out to the Laodiceans bears strong consideration for us today. They needed to hear the voice of the Spirit.

They had lost their vitality and weren't on fire for God, nor were they frozen in their spirituality, they had a lukewarm heart. The church was comfortable, complacent, and didn't realize it. As Jesus' bride we have no excuse for not being passionate in the Spirit and in our prayers.

Next time you're sitting and enjoying a cup of coffee or tea just think about how bad it gets if the waitress doesn't come with a refill, the refill we need because we haven't been drinking fast enough or paying attention until it has become lukewarm.

There is no divine commendation given to this church because they were too busy commending themselves. They thought they were glorifying God when in fact they were dishonoring His name. The Laodiceans were independent, self-satisfied, and secure, they thought they didn't need anything but how wrong they were.

*John 15:5-8 "**I am the vine, you are the branches.** He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for **without Me you can do nothing.** 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and **they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.** 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.*

The branch doesn't tell the vine what to do and without the vine it withers and dies, just fuel for the fire. The church at Smyrna thought it was poor when it was really rich while the Laodiceans boasted that they were rich when in fact they were poor. In my opinion, this is why churches and the bride decline spiritually. They begin to measure success by the world's standards instead of by spiritual values. The result today is the same; in the eyes of the Lord they are *wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked*. The solution? We need to pay the price to get true *gold tried in the fire*. Nothing will make us examine our priorities faster than suffering.

The letters to the seven churches are given to us by no one less than Jesus Himself so that we might examine our own lives and ministries. Judgment is coming to the world but it won't start there.

*1 Peter 4:17 **For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God;** and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the Gospel of God?*

How does Jesus get on the outside? How does a church or a believer get to the place where they think they're doing fine but are spiritually dead? Read the *Song of Solomon* where the bride tells her lover when he knocks that it's too early and she's too tired. By the time she finally opens the door he is nowhere to be found.

Is it too late for the bride in America? Is she too tired? Are you? Do you take time to be with the Lord when He knocks or are you too busy and then wonder where He is later on when you want Him? There is real danger for the bride, especially after she has been betrothed for awhile. Her self-centeredness leads to taking her bridegroom for granted. It's her failure to respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and being caught up in our "own holiness" that separates us from Jesus. Paul Minear in his commentary on *Revelation* wrote:

The only cure for poverty-stricken disciples was to purchase Christ's gold which is refined in the agonies of the shared passion. For their nakedness, the only recourse was to buy such clothes as the naked Christ had worn on the Cross. The blindness of self-deception could be cured only by understanding the correlation between Christ's love and His discipline. These three purchases constitute a substantial definition of the kind of zeal and repentance which was the burden of all John's prophecies. The thrust of these commands moves in the direction of rigorous warning. They are tantamount to saying, 'Open your eyes' and 'Carry your Cross.' This Letter argues against the widespread assertion of many interpreters to the affect that John's chief concern was to provide consolation to a persecuted Church. Nearer the mark would be the opposite assertion; that John, like Jesus, was concerned to bring not peace but a sword.

The Best Promise is that those who are victorious will sit with Him on His own victorious throne and share it as a victor. Jesus makes this promise to every believer, even to those whose relationship with Him has deteriorated like the Laodiceans. He is speaking to every man, woman,

and child now as He has in every generation—it's not too late. Whether that door remains closed or swings wide open to receive His forgiving love and grace is up to each and every believer. No one can take that responsibility for another and Jesus will never force the door open.

How do you hold a dove? Not with a clenched fist but with an open palm. Holding it tight will only make it fight to get away while an open palm gives it the choice and encourages it to stay and not fly away. This letter is both the sternest of the seven and yet the most tender. In spite of their condition Jesus wanted them to know that He still loved them but He needed to shake them out of their stupor before it was too late. He didn't want to stand by and watch them continue to spiral down, but He wasn't going to compel them to repent. He will only knock. Their freedom of choice was preserved and it was their option to answer the door to restoration or ignore the knock at their own peril.

Let not the bride become today's Laodicean church, the end-time apostate church that forsakes Jesus. Let her rather become the church at Philadelphia, the overcoming and victorious church of Jesus Rest. Let that also be the goal of each of us who claim to be the bride of Christ.

In the final chapter we will take a collective look at what these letters mean for the church and the bride today. We will also look at how they are already impacting this next—and I truly believe the last—move of God that is about to take place. He is preparing us for His return and these letters are a wakeup call. In them we haven't only found rebuke but we have also found a strong message of encouragement. It's my prayer that the Lord will help each of us to hear what the Spirit is saying today, not only to the church but to each of us individually.

CHAPTER 9

SO WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE THE BRIDE?

Conclusion

The destiny of every human being depends on his relationship to Jesus Christ. It is not on his relationship to life, or on his service or his usefulness, but simply and solely on his relationship to Jesus Christ.

Oswald Chambers

In this book we have experienced both the power and the love of God. Only He would set aside His awesome power and authority to reach out to His precious bride in love. To awaken her out of her slumber and warn her of the danger surrounding her, the danger of allowing her heart and affections to wander. And while many view His words as demanding and harsh yet we hear in them the voice of One who continues to cry out for her to return in spite of all that she has done. I wonder if we would—could—do the same.

As we look back in time it isn't hard to see that our God has been consistent—unchanging—in the way He has dealt with His creation. We only need to look back at the history of how He dealt with Israel when she strayed from Him, ignoring His Word and His prophets, assimilating into the world around them, and becoming “of” the world. Here in the opening verses of His *Revelation* we find that nothing has changed, only the ones who are reading the letters.

The messages haven't changed because “the message” hasn't changed. It is one of love that reaches out with open arms and cries out

for a wandering bride to return, a message of restoration and reconciliation. Do you remember God's words to the prophet Hosea?

Hos 1:3 When the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea: "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord." So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

The name Hosea in Hebrew means "deliverer," and Gomer means "completion." In Hosea, God would not only show His faithfulness but in Gomer the total unfaithfulness of Israel. God sent His prophet to take a whore for a wife, a whore representing an unfaithful Israel. God calls Himself the husband of Israel and as a wife she had continually been unfaithful to Him. So He told Hosea—a pure man—to go join himself in marriage to one of them that had committed spiritual fornication against Him. He was to wed one that departed (from following after) the Lord. He was to bring her into remembrance, to forget those things which were behind and once again follow after the Lord. Hosea was called to make the same choice that was facing God whom was faced with choosing to be faithful to Israel who was guilty of spiritual adultery. Sadly, God could not forgive Israel for what she would not acknowledge and therefore He gave her the desires of her heart.

How clearly this reflects our relationship with Jesus. Do we really want Him to be our Lord and Saviour, our God? Do we resist His guidance, His Word? Is there a lack of holiness in our life? How about the church, is it mired in a culture of tradition that we demand of it? Unfortunately, in many cases the answer is a resounding yes. And it is here that we tread on very slippery ground.

As we begin to slip and slowly slide down that slope, drifting away from God in our pursuit of self-satisfaction we begin to find ourselves headed in a direction toward the one place we never want to find ourselves. The more we drift the more our pride refuses to acknowledge how spiritually empty we are until we wind up at a place where we don't think we have any sin to confess. It's all about the faults of others or the circumstances of life that are against us. At some point we draw close to the point at which we become closed to the call of God's Spirit:

*Matt 12:31-32 "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the **blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men**. 32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.*

We place ourselves in danger of failing to repent for our sins and to continue in that state means that they cannot be forgiven. It is denying the power of God to forgive and restore. God cannot forgive the rejection of His Son and He will do anything He can to keep that from happening. One only needs to consider the Laodiceans and how God continued to reach out to them in spite of how far they had drifted from Him. For us it is possible to say “no” to God for so long that we no longer are capable of saying “yes” in order to receive His forgiveness. That was exactly where God found Israel in Hosea’s day.

Today there are many Christians who say they believe in Jesus, pray, read the Word, and take an active role in their church; good Christians. But they are not really growing in their faith, deepening their relationship with Jesus or leading others to Him. Paul warned us that this attitude strikes straight at the heart of God:

*Eph 4:30 And **do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God**, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

Paul’s use of the word “grieve” in relationship to our resisting God’s love is exactly how God felt with regard to Israel. Anything that blocks His love and forgiveness for us is what grieves Him like putting possessions, people, power, or position ahead of Him. Anything that deflects us from following the “individual” calling He has set before us to love and serve Him and others causes Him pain. It’s for that very reason that God continues to confront us with what we are and what we have failed to be and do. Our culture-bound church that tolerates the humanistic society around us grieves God deeply. As Lloyd Ogilvie so aptly put it: *our sensual, sex-centric, pornographically saturated culture might even make the priests of Baal blush!*

How awesome then that He “could not” give up on His wife— Israel—no matter how unfaithful she had been. Even more tragic was the fact that Israel not only continued in sin, she no longer acknowledged her sin and didn’t seek God’s forgiveness. It’s the same way He elects to choose us when we reject His faithfulness with our unfaithfulness, no matter what depths we sink to. But His redemption doesn’t come without a price as He will not—cannot—turn a blind eye to our sin. So, He needs to confront us with our sin and provide a way to heal us. We must turn from our sinful past and look to Him as our only source of redemption and restoration:

*Phil 3:13-14 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, **forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.** 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of **the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.***

That is the path that God took with Israel when He asked Hosea to take Gomer as his wife, a wife that later returned to where she came from and sank even lower than before. And what did God do then?

*Hos 3:1-3 Then the Lord said to me, "**Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans.**" 2 So **I bought her for myself** for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley. 3 And I said to her, "You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man—so, too, will I be toward you."*

Can you imagine the shame that Hosea felt when God first asked him to marry Gomer, and then after she returned to her depraved lifestyle and didn’t deserve his reconciliation He asked him to *go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover*. Praise God that He never gives up. Man is like that today, he doesn’t naturally desire God in his fallen state and only searches after his own independence, a state that we are ever drawn back to as Christians by our old nature. Hosea is for us the clearest example of

why God sent Jesus to purchase us—to pay the ultimate price—in the first place and why He is sending Him again to call us back from our wandering infidelity. How blessed we are that God’s love for us is based on action and not emotion.

*Rom 5:5-8 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God **has been poured out in our hearts** by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. 6 For when we were still without strength, in due time **Christ died for the ungodly**. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that **while we were still sinners, Christ died for us**.*

Fast forward now to the *Book of Revelation* where once again God uses someone holy—Jesus—to call once again that which has become unholy. The very One who was pure from before the moment He was in His mother’s womb was sent to redeem those, which time and time again have been guilty of sin.

*Eph 5:27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, **not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish**.*

God sent His Son once again to His bride, to call her and take her back. His voice shook the churches then and it still does today. He delivered seven messages that touch every level of man’s condition. The bride of Christ has slowly and almost imperceptible progressed away from the way she was established in the *Book of Acts* on the Day of Pentecost, and God uses these messages to clearly show her the reasons. He delivered them to admonish and yet encourage; warn of judgment and yet restore. His messages were woven with a golden thread—remember, return, and repent. This golden thread is the only answer for these messages that directly address and confront the bride of Christ today.

The importance of these seven messages, these seven love letters, is critical for the bride. No one can argue that there are monumental events taking place in the world that point to *all these things*. There are many things happening in the Spirit all over the world that we’re not

experiencing in many churches and meetings here in America, and there are many reasons why. Perhaps we only need to consider one:

*Matt 13:58 Now He did not do many mighty works there **because of their unbelief.***

I have talked with many who minister outside of North America and they are witnessing the presence of the Holy Spirit in their meetings in tremendously powerful ways. They are seeing miracle healings, deliverance, and spiritual restoration as the Holy Spirit moves in response to the spoken Word and the faith of those who hear it and respond. Will we see that happen here? I believe the answer is held in the Word that Jesus is sharing with His bride around the world. He is getting ready to move in a mighty way, but He is first dealing with His bride, and that is why He wants her to take heed of these messages.

It means that Jesus is calling her to wake up, take stock of her spiritual condition and take the necessary steps to restore her relationship with Him before it's too late. It means that churches and believers, if they want to be a part of this next move of God, need to press into the Holy Spirit and find out where He is and go there. If you don't understand who He is and why He's here you will never be able to move in the faith and the power you need to stand up to an enemy that knows who you are and hates the Gospel you carry. You need to discover the gifts that God has given you for the body of Christ and begin using them because, like faith, they can only be built up through use.

Our focus needs to be in the world, depending on the strength and power of the Spirit to keep us from becoming a part of it. Jesus wants His bride out serving her fellow man as He demonstrated to us over and over again during His short life here on earth where He spent most of His time out in the world spreading the Gospel. We need to find ways of meeting an unbelieving world that will overcome their hypocritical view of Christians with the genuine love of God. We will never see the lost in our sphere of influence if we just sit in church and wait for them to come. It hasn't happened in the past and it isn't going to happen now.

Sadly, those who continue their empty, nominal Christianity are going to miss this next move and tragically they won't witness what the bride is going to be blessed to see. As individual believers we need to

strengthen our spirit, build up our faith and hone our spiritual gifts. God has a plan for each one of us that is to be played out right there where we live and work. But if we aren't tuned in and listening to the voice of His Spirit we'll walk right by the door that's just been opened.

I believe what I have shared here more strongly than anything I have ever heard from the Lord. He is ever so close to returning and we dare not—cannot—ignore the importance of His letters to the churches, to His bride. The underlying problem in five of the churches was the diminished presence of the Holy Spirit. He is the One that Jesus sent in His stead; the One who comes along side to assist, lead, counsel, direct, empower, love, minister, and all so much more. He is the One who will be leading this move of God and if you don't know Him (intimately) you need to, if you don't understand His gifting you need to find out, and if you aren't fully yielded to Him you need to find out why and deal with it immediately. Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- Remember where you went wrong, return to the One you left and repent and receive His grace.
- Know the Spirit, reconnect, and trust Him for power, wisdom, and guidance.
- Know your calling and gifting and step out and use them. Don't deprive the body of Christ what you have been given.
- Allow the Spirit to hone those gifts through the tests and trials that will strengthen them.
- Be prepared to “move out,” strengthened and equipped within to share the Gospel in your world and to make disciples.
- There is no longer time for “holy huddles” as God is moving outside the church because the church is not moving.
- Remember that the centerpiece of Christianity is “relationship.”

How much does Jesus love His Bride? To that question there isn't a sufficient answer. We can't grasp the enormity of His love. Perhaps we might get a clue if we think back on His message to the church at Pergamos. If you remember it was a church that had allowed the vile and evil practices of Jezebel to infiltrate their midst. Yet for all the horrible pain and suffering she caused it wasn't that for which God was about to

punish her. No, it was because He gave her “time” to repent and she refused to.

That’s the message of Revelation... *the time is short but there is still time to remember, return and repent.* I am very confident that you have, as I have, found many of the characteristics of these churches in your own heart, but thank God we only need to have an ear and “hear” (understand and respond) to what the Spirit is saying. What He is saying today is that there is a new move coming in which He is going to be actively reaching out to spread the Gospel in America, and it’s going to take place out there in the harvest fields. The choice is ours to open or not open our door, the one He’s knocking on. When we answer it may hurt for a time after it’s open but it won’t last for long and the rewards far outweigh any suffering on our part. Remember, He only chastises those He loves.

Will we be ready? Will we be spiritually healthy? Will we be spiritually empowered? If the answer is yes we’re going to experience the hand of God in ways we never dreamed of ... *one open door after another.*

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The Doorway To Rest—The Brides’ Invitation... When we consider Solomon’s Song—the love relationship he had with one of his wives—we can easily see the relationship between Christ and His bride portrayed. And that relationship has been portrayed in many ways. Think of the “sun’s” relationship with the moon being like our relationship with the “Son.” This book is a detailed, verse by verse study of the *Song of Solomon*, revealing the true view of bride of Christ through the eyes of the bridegroom and a life changing view of the bridegroom through the eyes of the bride.

The Pathway To Rest—The Brides’ Purpose... As we looked at the message of the *Song of Solomon* we were given a clear picture of not only who our bridegroom is, but equally important how He sees us and how we should see Him. His invitation opened the doorway to His Rest and now, as we walk out the days of our *ketubah*—our betrothal—we need to find out what that means and what it entails along the pathway to His Rest. For that we turn to the book of *Hebrews*, where we learn through each verse what sewing our wedding dress means and how important it is for us to be ready and watching for His soon return as we move up the path to spiritual maturity.

The Dangers To Rest—The Brides’ Warning... We have been inundated with not the shout of triumph but the incessant worldly scream of pending disaster. The country’s economics have been turned upside down and fear and panic have grabbed the headlines as the Middle East falls into chaos. The news is full of rampant pandemics, meteorological disasters, hopeless individuals committing tragic acts and families destroyed. And sadly, the majority of the bride of Christ is not

prepared for His return. We have allowed the world and its supreme ruler to distract us from the path the lies in front of us. Now He has finally released me to write this verse-by-verse study out of the book of *Revelation* that He put on my heart 18 years ago concerning His letters that not only deal with why He is coming back but also what we, His bride, are supposed to be doing and not doing as we wait and watch.

The Battle For Rest—The Brides' Armor... Spiritual warfare is a war between the forces of God and the forces of rebellion led by Satan. And the bride is engaged in this spiritual war between light and darkness, good and evil, Heaven and Hell and Christ and Satan. But sadly, many aren't even aware of the fact that they are in a spiritual battle every day of their life. As believing Christians we're in a grim conflict and not on a worldly cruise ship or a showboat; it's a battleship. It is a fight to the finish with no holds barred and we can't be neutral and we can't call a truce. And this war is a personal one; very personal. In this book we have taken a detailed verse-by-verse study of the part of the book of *Ephesians* that deals with the enemy, his strategies and his goals and most importantly the battle orders we have been given from our commander-in-chief to ensure victory over those personal strongholds the enemy has established in our lives.

The Way Of Enoch... In this series I have attempted to open the door to a solid study of our foundation by looking at our Walk With God in eight volumes. Each volume takes a look at a key fundamental part of our walk. They were written with the goal of challenging the bride of Christ to firm up her underpinning and step into the Spirit-filled, victorious and abundant life that Jesus has for her. And to accomplish that we need to draw near to Him through the leading of the Holy Spirit. Our Christian life should be spent with Jesus where He is now, in the Holiest Place. It's there that we will find His mercy and grace in the power of His blood. This series explores the foundation and sound scriptural doctrine that underlies God's plan for our lives. It is a journey beginning with learning who God really is and culminating with discovering how we are to walk out a loving and obedient relationship with our Creator.

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- Volume 3—*Foundations of Faith*
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